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BCM #9 Introduction by Rich Johnston

The Crystal Ball And The Bouncy Ball

Kids! They are, quite literally, our future. They carry out genetic material from one century into the next. The only thing is, as of date, no scientists have managed to isolate the gene for appreciating comic books.

It's probably there. Reading comics works best for folks at ease with both left and right sides of their brain, able to marry that which comprehends words and that which interprets images.

But what's more important than nature, it seems, is nurture. Those who don't read comics as a child can find it incredibly hard to read them as an adult. It can be learned, it can be experienced, but it doesn't always come as easy.

There's also the heady appeal of nostalgia. I know I will forgive much from a *Captain Britain* comic when it instantly transports me to a service station off a motorway when I was eight years old, and picked up a copy of Alan Moore and Alan Davis' finest.

The lesson is simple. Start them young. I mean, they're going to screw up their lives one way or another; might as well be with comics.

And you know there will be a new *Tintin* comic in around 2050. The publishers have said as much. And someone has to write and draw it...

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See Inside Back Cover for Details!

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LIFE IN THE GUTTERS
By Rich Johnston

Kids today, they don't know they're born, unless they look it up on Wikipedia.

I wish I'd had the internet when I was a kid. Seriously.

Growing up, in the seventies and eighties, I was pretty much the only kid who read comics. As in, read more than one. Sure, some kids had read a *Judge Dredd*, others a *Beano*, I even found one kid who read the Marvel UK reprints of *The Punisher* and we bonded, until I realised that kids who just read *The Punisher* and nothing else aren't really kids you want to hang around with too much, in case they try and stab, burn, or throttle you.

Of course, just reading comics wasn't enough, I had to try and create them. But where would I get my ideas from? Then, as now, I chose parodying other comics as a creative outlet. Though, I admit, it's tough to entertain an audience when they don't know the comics that are being parodied. So I soon turned to parodying school life, and that was much better, even if a superhero crept in occasionally.

It was then that I turned to a life of crime. Oh, there are plenty of folks working in comics who are confessed criminals, but in my case, it was all in the higher calling of making comics. I used to trick secretaries into using first the reproduction machine, and then I moved onto the photocopier. I had to forge many a teacher's permission slip. And then breaking into the offices to use the photocopier during sports days when the staff was out of the building.

By the time I was an older teenager; I'd gone legit and discovered that actual comic book shops existed. Not that I knew anyone who shopped there. But I found my comic book skills gave me a little access into social groups, especially when they worked out I could design tattoos. I remain uninked myself, but there are a few of my friends still sporting a rather dodgy skull of butterflies.

But through it all, I'd mostly ploughed my way through alone. I was convinced that there was magic in comic books. If no one else shared my belief then that was their loss.

Then I went to university and found a comic book social life denied me so long. And I discovered the internet, in its early form, message boards, acres of text and... comic books. There were people talking

about them, Americans too, some of them comic creators. And they were gossiping...

And Bleeding Cool as you now know it was born, right there. I gathered up some gossip, started finding new sources, and became a hub for this kind of thing. People started coming to me.

It wasn't plain sailing, though. University online time at the library was limited. And, you know, some of it I had to use for work (I apparently created the first online guide to a politician's voting behaviour which pushed me from a 2:2 grade to a 2:1).

And after university... Well, commercial online access was hard to come by. And I didn't actually have a computer or anything. And they didn't have the internet at work. So it was back to fraud again.

This time approaching a university student and pretending to be conducting a survey into their use of a computer, finding someone who would never ever use their login, and then asking for their details, registering an account under their name, and using it myself after work. K.E.Jones, I owe you much.

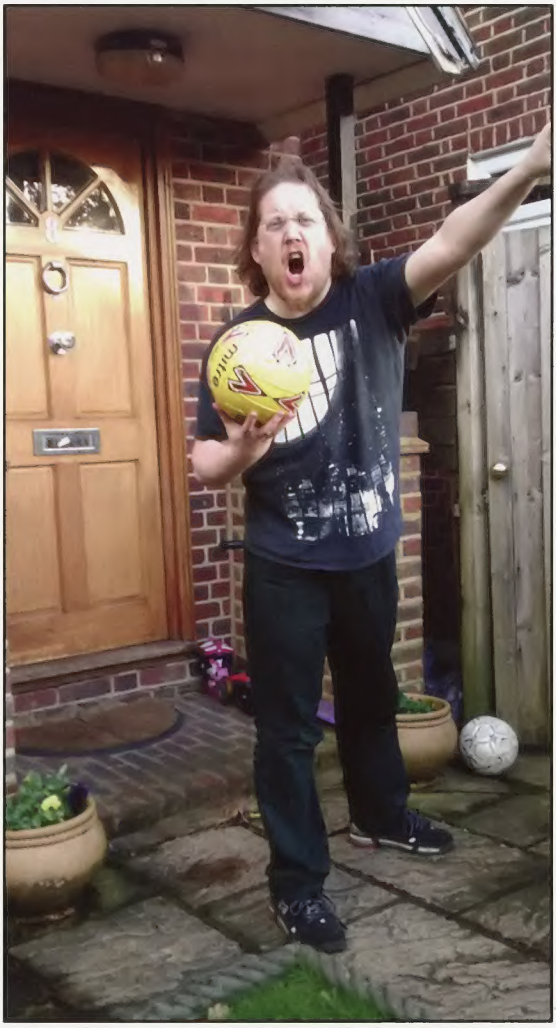
Moving to Oxford for work, I joined a local internet cafe, paying fifty pounds a year ($100 back then) for an email account for a year. Six weeks later they went bust. So, back to criminality, I blagged my way into Oxford University premises and faked another ID. This would have to stop.

And it did, moving to London, there were cheaper internet cafes and soon I had the internet at home and only paid around sixty pounds a month for the privilege.

These days they have wi-fi in Starbucks. Hell, they have Starbucks.

That's where this all began for me, but kids today? They have it so easy. If there's something they are into that no one else at school cares about, there are thousands online who will. Also everyone seems to want to be a geek about something now. It's fashionable, it's cool, and the internet acts like a, well, network in connecting people, spreading ideas and finding new ways to entertain, express, educate, and enlighten. If they don't have a computer, then the library will. Or they just use their phone!

You kids. You have no idea how jealous I am of you. Get out of my yard!



Got a tip for Rich? You can contact him, or any Bleeding Cool contributor, with story tips, comments, questions, or to ask about advertising at: ***BleedingCool.com/contact***

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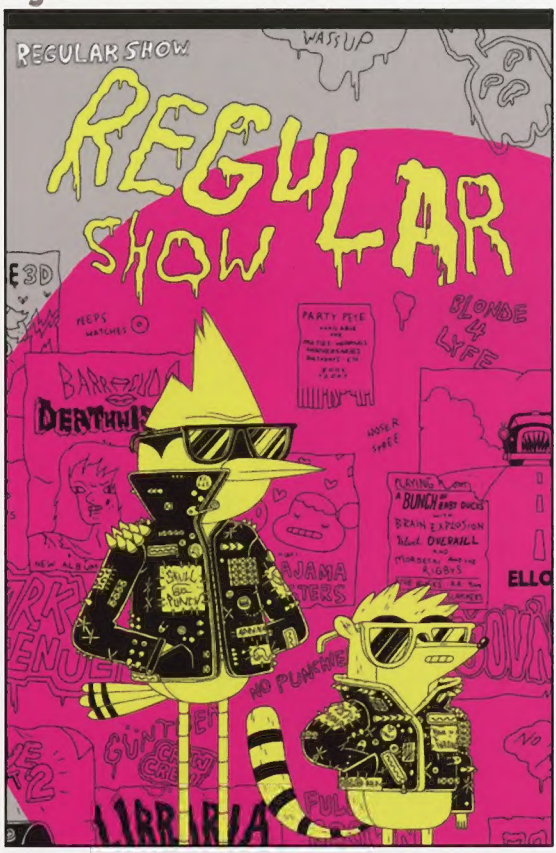
THE NOT SO REGULAR SHOW

An Interview with KC Green and Allison Strejlau

By James Kuhoric



Every once in a while, a new show comes along that is anything but regular. And J.G. Quintel's hit Cartoon Network series *Regular Show,* fits that unique mold. From the first viewing you can't quite tell what is real and what is aneurism induced fantasy as a world of living inanimate objects collides with smart talking anthropomorphic animals. The resulting lunacy is oddly magical. It is a mix of every bad 1980s sitcom you ever watched mashed up with current animation styles and the most absurd storylines you can dream up. The characters feel familiar, like friends, and it is easy to identify with their personalities. Everyone has their favorites...for me Benson, the downtrodden living gumball machine park manager and Skips the eternally youthful Yeti handyman are as familiar as family members. And

with every new episode you find yourself wondering what wonderfully insane antics Mordecai and Rigby will get the friends into next. Bleeding Cool had an opportunity to talk with KC Green and Allison Strejlau, the creators of BOOM! Studios' *Regular Show* comic series, to find out what madcap antics they have in store for the print adventures of our favorite slacker duo.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT WORKING ON THE *REGULAR SHOW* COMICS?

KCR I like playing with these already established characters—hoping I know them well enough to see how they would deal with this situation that I make up or another situation. Or maybe seeing how far I could take the scenario for them to deal with. That's always fun to mess around with.

AS They let me have an insane amount of artistic freedom for a licensed comic and I always find myself excited about taking advantage of that and trying something new with whatever KC gives me. I always get a lot of play later in the story arc and I really appreciate being able to take a script and run with it.

KC, WHICH IS YOUR FAVORITE CHARACTER TO WRITE?

KCR Rigby. He's pure id and a tragic character. You feel bad for him more often than the others, which is why he feels so relatable too.

ALLISON, WHICH IS YOUR FAVORITE CHARACTER TO DRAW?

AS Skips, which was really unexpected for me. I remember dreading drawing him because his shape was completely out of my comfort zone, and now

I can't get enough!

WHAT'S YOUR WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TEAM THAT WORKS ON THE TV SHOW?

KCR I mostly see their notes from what our Editors (Shannon and Whitney) send back to me. I do not know who writes them though. Most of the time it is sensible changes to stick with the feel of the show, but there was one time I had to write back and be all"Y'all have done similar things in the show, come on."

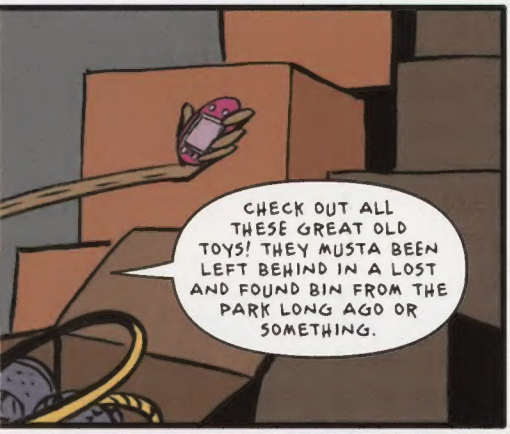
AS I give in my pages and will occasionally get edits back from the animation team. I hear it's JG himself which is something I try not to dwell on otherwise I'd become a pile of goo.

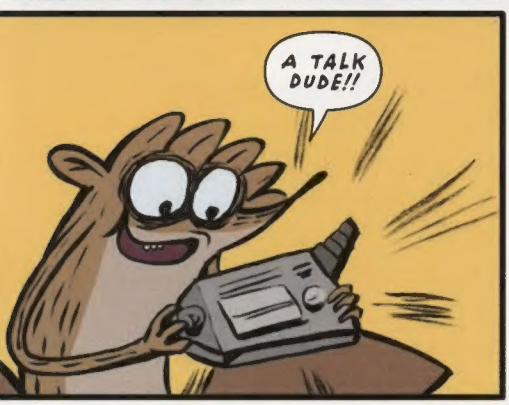
KC, HOW DO YOU COME UP WITH YOUR STORYLINES?

KCR The way the show is set up it's not too hard. It's almost sitcom-ish, but then you take it to a crazier/more fun degree than what would happen on a regular sitcom. You watch the show enough and get a feel; it's not hard to come up with similar ideas for them to deal with. You just gotta put in your time and piece together a concept.

ALLISON, WHAT'S IT LIKE TO WORK OFF ESTABLISHED STYLE GUIDES FOR THESE CHARACTERS? ARE YOU ABLE TO ADD A LITTLE BIT OF YOUR OWN STYLE INTO YOUR ILLUSTRATIONS?

AS If you look closely at the show not even that is completely on model all the time; I know I can sometimes tell who did the storyboards based off the animation style. I have my own way of drawing them and I didn't realize I was doing it when I was trying to pin the designs down at first, but now it's there. I'm trying something very





different with the format for the issue I'm wrapping up now, and I'm honestly surprised at how supportive everyone has been. It's really exciting because I get to challenge myself all I want and try new things with layout and form. At the same time, I know I need to keep clarity in the fore at all times especially so because it's an all-ages book and I know kids are reading it, so it's about balancing all that.

What is it like to work on a licensed property? Do you work directly with creator JG Quintel and/or Cartoon Network?

KCR It helps that they are already established for you to jump off of. The hard stuff is done for you, now you get to play with the sets other people made for you. Again, I think our editors talk more to CN or JG directly than I do. I follow some of the storyboard artists on Twitter and they are cool.

AS I love to hear from the fans of the show and hear their opinions of how we're interpreting it, so it's nice that it already has a substantial interest like that.

Has the experience working on Regular Show influenced your personal work?

KCR Working on scripting and stuff for another artist has helped me learn to put together a script better for other artists. Which is good, since I am about to work with another artist on a new project soon. It's taught me to let go of stuff better, as I would mostly work by myself. It's helped me trust the capabilities of the other person I'm working with which helps me let go more of the work that I do and not be so in my own head.

AS My personal work was always ridiculously regimented to a

fault, but doing a monthly has made me realize how important storytelling is and that things don't have to be perfect. It's brought more focus on keeping things together and fun.

WHAT ANIMATED SHOWS DID YOU WATCH AS KIDS, AND HOW HAS THAT INFLUENCED YOUR WORK ON *REGULAR SHOW*, IF AT ALL?

KCR Mostly Looney Tunes and stuff from Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network in the '90s and early 2000's. I never got into the action cartoons of those eras, though I was aware of them. I was into comedy and weirdness. Anything new to my eyes was watched by the same eyes. Learning comedy from those toons has helped me work on my own comics and timing for years before I was asked to write for *Regular Show*.

AS I quickly grew obsessed with *Dragon Ball Z* and that influenced me a great deal growing up. Looking back I think I just like things that focus more about the journey. It works with the pacing of *Regular Show* as there is usually a long calm period before things grow out of control.

HOW DID YOU FIRST BREAK INTO COMICS?

KCR I've been drawing and writing comics since I was a kid and before I understood how to upload them to an Angelfire site. And I've been doing webcomics since then and still do. My first big break though was probably doing a comic in *Nickelodeon Magazine* in 2007 when I was still in college, if that is what you meant.

AS This is my first drawn published work, but I did a bit of color work before for the awesome folks at Archie. I've been drawing comics all my life though, especially in middle and high school. I just pumped out hundreds of pages for practice.

I owe a great deal to everyone I've met through SVA for being able to do break in to the industry now.

WHAT OTHER THINGS ARE YOU WORKING ON THAT WE CAN LOOK OUT FOR OR LOOK FORWARD TO?

KCR I still do a webcomic at gunshowcomic.com where you can see my own stuff. I'm working on a couple of upcoming projects also to be online soon, one an animated thing, and another webcomic I'm writing with Anthony Clark (nedroid.com) doing the art for.

AS Yes! I'm working on illustrating a longer story written by Nick Bertozzi. It's still very early in the project but he's brilliant and I'm so humbled to be part of it.

MORDECAI AND RIGBY ARE A PAIR OF SERIOUS TROUBLEMAKERS. TELL US ONE OF YOUR STORIES WHEN YOU GOT INTO SOME SERIOUS TROUBLE.

KCR I was a quiet kid and didn't get in much trouble. Though, one time I was messing with one of those long-neck lighters and started a small fire in our garage that my mom quickly put out. I was in trouble for that big time, but I didn't mess with lighters anymore. I learn from my mistakes (mostly).

AS I have an older brother so I was busy being the victim of said troublemaking. He would get his hands on these fireworks where you have to pull both ends of a string to set it off and he would boobytrap the house. When you'd put the toilet seat up to go it'd explode in your face, so that was fun haha.

G.I. JOE: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

by James McFadden

"Quartered in top-secret armored underground bunkers – deep beneath the Army Chaplains Assistant School at Fort Wadsworth – is America's elite counter-terrorist strike force! Code named: G.I. Joe – the most fearsome rapid deployment team of all stands ready to fight – anywhere – any time – any way!"

Those words were the opening narration from Marvel Comics' *G.I. Joe #1*, introducing readers to a series that started out as a simple promotional tool for a line of toys, but became much more. While still in the planning stages of the re-launch of their classic toy line, Hasbro approached Marvel with the goal of giving the new G.I. Joe a storyline and a cast of characters. While Hasbro provided the concept and design of the G.I. Joe team and its world, it was the contributions of Marvel – particularly writer Larry Hama – that breathed life into those toy designs, and made G.I. Joe one of the most successful franchises of the 1980s and '90s. But G.I. Joe's comic book history actually goes all the way back to its original incarnation in 1964.

The Early Years

Prior to the popular toy line, G.I. Joe was first the title of a comic strip printed during World War II in a magazine for American soldiers, *Yank*. That strip is often credited with popularizing the term "G.I. Joe" which came to refer to the average American fighting man. In the 1950s, it was the title of a long-running comic book set during the Korean War. In 1964, the Hassenfeld Brothers toy company (later known as Hasbro) gave the name to their line of 12-inch military action figures. Some

of the earliest advertisements for the toys were print ads in DC Comics. In late 1964, issues #53 and #54 of DC's anthology series *Showcase* bore the title *G.I. Joe*, and featured short stories by various writers and artists, but the content was not entirely new. The stories were reprinted from earlier DC war comics set during World War II, and introduced within a new frame story asking viewers to choose which story's star deserved the "G.I. Joe Prize." Among the comics' artists were the now famous Russ Heath and Joe Kubert, both of whom would contribute to G.I. Joe decades later. Heath would become one of the primary character designers for the 1980s G.I. Joe cartoon series, while Kubert would provide the packaging artwork for the short-lived Joe toy line from 1995, Sgt. Savage and his Screaming Eagles.

Following the *Showcase* issues, there were no G.I. Joe comics until the military toys were re-themed in 1969 to become the Adventures of G.I. Joe and, a year later, the Adventure Team. Many of those civilian themed action figures and accessory sets included short mini-comics featuring adventures that children could recreate with their toys. The artwork in the comics were simple, and the story was provided by a narrator who referred to each of the various adventurers only as "G.I. Joe." Though the popular comics inspired scenarios for children to place their action figures in, no true characters or mythology were created aside from the science fiction inspired Atomic Man, Mike Power. These comics ran until 1976, after which G.I. Joe was again re-launched as the futuristic, smaller scale Super Joe Adventure Team in 1977. That toy line featured alien invaders and creatures from outer space but barely lasted two years before its cancellation, and never included any comic stories.

A Real American Hero

In 1981, Hasbro set out to bring G.I. Joe action figures back in a new smaller scale, similar to the extremely popular toys based on the Star Wars films. G.I. Joe would be re-launched as a team, complete with individual characters and a storyline to go with it. Without a movie to carry the line, Hasbro approached Marvel Comics to create a comic book to tell the story of G.I. Joe. To advertise it, a series of animated commercials based on issues of the comic were produced. At the time, regulations did not allow advertising toys with full length animated commercials, but there were no such regulations about comic books. Larry Hama's extensive personal knowledge of the military made him a perfect choice to write the series. Hama had already been planning a new comic book team called *Fury Force* – a small military unit led by the son of Marvel's Nick Fury – and adapted the unused concept for G.I. Joe. Others involved in the planning stages of the comic included Marvel Editor-in-Chief Jim Shooter and Editor Archie Goodwin. After learning Hasbro was not planning to include villains in their toy line, Marvel convinced the company that G.I. Joe needed an enemy to fight. According to both Hama and Shooter, it was Goodwin who suggested a paramilitary organization in the vein of Marvel's Hydra, named Cobra. While writing the initial issues of the comic book, Hama wrote a series of character profiles in the style of Army personnel records to help him keep track of the large cast of characters. The profiles were for Hama's own personal use, but Hasbro executives who saw them were so impressed that the profiles were adapted into the famous file cards included on every action figure's package.

The new G.I. Joe toy line and comic series were released in the Spring of 1982, announced to the world by the first television commercial to ever advertise a comic book. *G.I. Joe #1* featured art by penciler Herb Trimpe and inker Bob McLeod and introduced the G.I. Joe team and its enemies in "Operation: Lady Doomsday." The issue included a second story, "Hot Potato," alongside a detailed cutaway of the team's underground headquarters, the Pit, and a handful of character profiles. The series was popular from the start and would eventually become one of Marvel's bestsellers and its number one subscription title. The series was an action adventure series, peppered with comedy, military jargon, and an enemy organization of flamboyantly dressed James Bond-esque villains. Despite being a "toy comic," Hama never dumbed down the series, which would remain far more mature than its cartoon counterpart. In 1983, the animated commercials evolved into a five episode mini-series

aired on weekday afternoons. The cartoon was aimed at a younger audience than the comic book and was more likely to include elements of science fiction and fantasy, though original comic book characters like General Flagg and, more importantly, the Baroness made their way into the cartoon. Though Marvel's animation arm, Marvel Productions, produced the series with Sunbow Productions, Hama himself had no involvement in the cartoon.

Even though new characters from Hasbro's toy line were added to the comic book every year and had their time in the spotlight, Hama always returned to Snake-Eyes, the iconic silent commando that the series often focused on. Perhaps G.I. Joe's most famous comic story appeared in *G.I. Joe #21*. "Silent Interlude" told the tale of Snake-Eyes' rescue of Scarlett from a Cobra fortress in an entirely silent issue. The story included no dialogue or sound effects and was told through the artwork, penciled by Hama himself and inked by Steve Leialoha. The issue introduced the Cobra ninja, Storm Shadow and hinted at a connection between him and Snake-Eyes. Issue #26 saw the return of Hama's artwork in part one of a story revealing Snake-Eyes and Storm Shadow's past as fellow Vietnam War veterans and ninja apprentices whose world was shattered by the murder of Storm Shadow's uncle, the Hard Master. Storm Shadow joined Cobra after being accused of the murder, and he and Snake-Eyes remain rivals until he leaves Cobra and joins the Joes. The relationship between the two characters was so influential that it has been a major part of the G.I. Joe mythology in nearly every incarnation including the recent live-action films.

Besides the saga of Snake-Eyes and Storm Shadow, Marvel's G.I. Joe gave us epic stories like the foundation of the sovereign nation of Cobra Island, and the Joes' invasion of Cobra's secret headquarters in the sleepy town of Springfield. More mature themes were explored when G.I. Joe members Stalker, Snow Job, and Quick Kick were arrested during a disastrous mission in Soviet territory and spent five months in a gulag before being rescued. Later in the series, a war in the Middle East claimed the lives of thirteen Joes.

Marvel Comics' *G.I. Joe* lasted twelve years, continuing as long as the G.I. Joe toy line was in stores. A second series, *G.I. Joe: Special Missions* lasted twenty-eight issues, while other spin-offs were released including a crossover with the other Hasbro property that Marvel was heavily involved with: *The Transformers*. Almost every G.I. Joe comic was written by Larry Hama, including 1994's *G.I. Joe #155*, the last of the series, which came shortly before the end of the toy line.

The 1995 follow up to A Real American Hero was the more classically military Sgt. Savage and His Screaming Eagles, which starred a World War II era hero revived in the present day. Two short mini-comics were included with some of the toys, and the action figures came with short comic strips printed on their packaging, but the line barely lasted more than a year. The futuristic G.I. Joe Extreme proved a bit more successful, lasting long enough to air two seasons of an animated series. A new comic book was released along with it by Dark Horse Comics, which started with a four-issue limited series. A new ongoing series began shortly after but never made it past its fourth issue, and the toy line was soon cancelled.

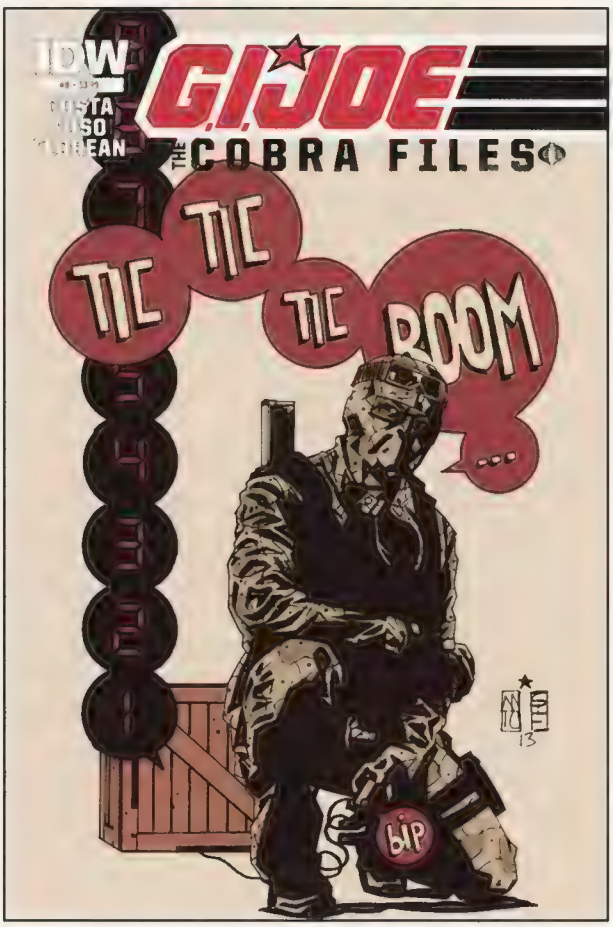
The American Hero Returns

In 1997, Hasbro sparked renewed interest in the 1980s G.I. Joe by releasing a collection of repainted action figures exclusively in Toys R Us in celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of A Real American Hero. Longtime fans were pleased to hear the 1999 announcement from young comic publisher Bench Press Studios that they were preparing to release an all-new G.I. Joe series written by Larry Hama set shortly after the end of Marvel's comic, as well as a Special Missions-style series, *G.I. Joe: Strike Force*. Problems followed when it was learned that the company's deal was not yet finalized and their negotiations with Hasbro eventually fell through. The series got no further than a brief proposal from Larry Hama, and a three-page promotional story with artwork by Ron Lim. But two years later, another new company named Devil's Due Publishing acquired the G.I. Joe comic license and released a new *G.I. Joe #1* in September of 2001.Written by company founder Josh Blaylock, the new series depicted the Joe team's reinstatement following the return of Cobra Commander to the United States after Cobra's defeat several years earlier. The series followed along with Marvel's storyline, mixing some new characters in with the original Joes, including the son of Destro and the daughter of Zartan. The new comic had a successful debut that received some mixed reviews, but most fans were happy to see G.I. Joe return. *G.I. Joe: Front Line* was the second Devil's Due series, starting out with a four-issue arc written by Larry Hama, and more mini-series and one shot comics followed. Devil's Due also released four mini-series crossover with the Transformers in an agreement with Dreamwave, who published Transformers at the time and released their own crossover with G.I. Joe set in an alternate World War II. Dreamwave planned a second series, but only published one issue before the company abruptly went out of

business.

During this time, Hasbro had begun a new G.I. Joe vs. Cobra toy line, along with a series of direct-to-DVD animated films and mini-comics set in a separate continuity from the Devil's Due comics, though some characters appeared in both the cartoons and comics. When a new animated series, *G.I. Joe: Sigma Six*, premiered in 2005, Devil's Due published a six-issue miniseries set in the world of the cartoon.

After twenty-five issues of the new G.I. Joe comic, writer Brandon Jerwa took over the book following a storyline that saw the Joes enter another civil war involving Cobra and Serpentor's splinter group, the Coil. In the issues that followed, the Joes battled Cobra as well as corrupt forces in their own government. One battle ended with General Hawk stabbed in the back and confined to a wheelchair. While still reeling from that setback, several Joes were arrested, and corrupt military commanders began to dismantle the team. A streamlined team then dealt with the threat of the mysterious Red Shadows (inspired by the enemy of Action Force, the UK's equivalent of G.I. Joe), who also nearly destroyed Cobra. The terrorist group proved themselves a true threat with the shocking killing of Lady Jaye, but were eventually defeated. Devil's Due then decided to end the book with *G.I. Joe #43* and re-launch the series.



G.I. Joe: America's Elite premiered in 2005 and featured a much smaller team led by the original G.I. Joe, General Joseph Colton. The initial storyline included the Joes fighting an unhinged Destro, who had become an even greater threat after the supposed death of the Baroness, followed by the controversial death and revival of Snake-Eyes. During this time, various "Declassified" miniseries explored the characters' pasts, including Brandon Jerwa's *Snake-Eyes Declassified*, and Larry Hama's exploration of the G.I. Joe team's earliest days in *G.I. Joe Declassified*. There was even an all-new comic set in an alternate continuity titled *G.I. Joe Reloaded*, which lasted fourteen issues and featured a version of Duke that was revealed to be a Cobra operative. Storm Shadow would eventually leave the Joe team for a time to star in his own self-titled solo series written by Larry Hama.

America's Elite would eventually reveal that an undercover Cobra Commander had replaced the White House Chief of Staff and gained access to the government's greatest secrets and vulnerabilities. His attempt to wipe out the Joes fails, but the team slowly realizes that Cobra agents have infiltrated governments all over the world. Soon, Cobra Commander's forces strike, literally starting

World War III. What followed was an unprecedented eleven-part storyline involving the entire G.I. Joe team fighting Cobra all around the globe. As this long-running arc was coming to a close, it was announced that Devil's Due Publishing's contract would not be renewed by Hasbro, who granted the license to IDW Publishing. The World War III arc ended with the final defeat of Cobra and the capture of Cobra Commander. In the final issue, 2008's *G.I. Joe: America's Elite #36*, the Joes gather at the site of their first headquarters to affirm their commitment to continue fighting for freedom.

IDW's New Beginning

IDW Publishing's plans for G.I. Joe when taking over the license in 2008 were to reboot the series as a more grown-up property while still honoring the past. The company hoped to attract existing fans of the franchise without excluding new fans. The new series existed in a more grounded, dangerous, and violent world. IDW launched three new books simultaneously. The main *G.I. Joe* title, written by Chuck Dixon, followed the adventures of the established Joe team, headquartered in a variation of the Pit that was more like an underground city. The very first of IDW's Joe stories appeared in *G.I. Joe #0* in 2009 and lasted only six pages, ending with a dying mercenary whispering, "Cobra," the name of an organization the Joes had never heard of. *G.I. Joe Origins* brought Larry Hama back to recount the formation of the team years earlier, prior to its massive expansion.

The third book – perhaps IDW's most talked about series – was *Cobra*, written by Christos Gage and Mike Costa. According to Editor-in-Chief Chris Ryall, "We, and Hasbro, wanted to push things forward in new ways, and I think were successful in doing so, especially with a series like Cobra. That one felt like no other G.I. Joe book that'd ever come before." The Cobra series played more like a psychological thriller than the action-adventure G.I. Joe was known for. It starred the Joes' deep undercover operative Chuckles, who infiltrates the newly-discovered organization and struggles to walk the fine line between pretending to be a ruthless terrorist and actually becoming one. In a shocking scene, Chuckles is forced to actually kill his G.I. Joe contact in order to save the mission and remain undercover.

All three series revealed a more complex Cobra organization structured more like a multi-tiered corporation than a paramilitary group. One division is a kind of religious sect led by Serpentor, reimagined as a cult leader. The G.I. Joe team, while very similar to its past appearances, also had an extra edge to it. Including the fact that the team is so secretive that members have to agree

to be listed as "killed in action," a lie told even to their families.

As the regular IDW series continued, starting in 2009 a number of tie-ins to the live action movie *G.I. Joe: Rise of Cobra* were released, including a prequel mini-series, a movie adaptation and two other sequels. In 2010, fans were thrilled to learn that Larry Hama would return with a new series starting with *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero #155 ½*, which allowed the original Joe writer to continue the classic series from where he left off in 1994. This continuation replaced Devil's Due Publishing's seven years of stories, which IDW began to reprint under the title "Disavowed."

IDW's plan split up their main G.I. Joe continuity into "seasons", with Season 1 lasting from early 2009 to early 2011. The first two years of storylines saw the Joes dealing with the threat of the mysterious Cobra organization, which expands greatly due to the MASS Device, a system of teleporters inspired by a machine from the original animated series. G.I. Joe of course destroys the machine, but it is Chuckles who provides the true climax of the story by doing something no Joe has ever done: kill Cobra Commander. The initial Cobra series comes to a close shortly after, with the death of Chuckles himself. This set up Season 2, which relaunched *G.I. Joe* and *Cobra* with new #1 issues and the addition of a *Snake-Eyes* series to replace the cancelled *Origins*. The stories that follow include the Cobra Civil War arc during which the high-ranking members of the terrorist group compete to become the new Cobra Commander by setting out to inflict the most death and misery on G.I. Joe and the world. The misery included the destruction of the Pit, scattering the Joes to various hidden bases. The eventual winner of Cobra's contest is a new character named Krake, a criminal and mercenary who joined Cobra years before. The new Cobra Commander's first act is to invade the Southeast Asian nation of Nanzhao, causing large scale destruction and wiping out heroin producing poppy fields. G.I. Joe and United Nations forces enter the fray, but casualties are high. Cobra then reveals that they plan to take over the country by destroying it, and do so with nuclear weapons. The aftermath of Nanzhao leads the military to remove General Hawk from command and place Duke in charge of an underfunded team facing greater scrutiny from the military.

Though not obvious at the time, one of the biggest developments of Season 2 was Cobra revealing G.I. Joe's existence to the public. That struck a chord with IDW editor John Barber: "I really liked that, and we were looking for a way to liven things up, and create a little of a new direction for the

comics. Not to throw everything out, not by any means, but to create a new direction." This played a vital role in Season 3, which would feature three distinct series, starting with a new *G.I. Joe #1* introducing the idea of a non-classified team. Barber explains, "The 'outing' of G.I. Joe was, I thought, a really big thing we could play with. The idea that the military would have to own up to having a secret team, and that they'd kind of lean into the pitch and really push things past just admitting it—to put the team out there in public, on display." Duke leads a smaller team under the supervision of IDW's version of General Joseph Colton. This team becomes the public face of G.I. Joe, complete with their own embedded blogger, while the true covert operations are given to a team led by Scarlett and Mainframe in the newest *G.I. Joe: Special Missions* series. The third series, *The Cobra Files*, continued on with some of the storyline of the Cobra series and features an even smaller team led by Flint, who find themselves working with former Cobra agents including Chameleon, who struggles to move beyond her past to join the "good guys." *The Cobra Files* ended its nine-issue run in December, and IDW plans to continue shaking up its entire line in the coming year.

Barber reveals, "We're wrapping up this run of *G.I. Joe* this spring... *Cobra Files* has ended, *Special Missions* is closing down, and the *G.I. Joe* series is ending with a really great 4-parter by writer Paul Allor." For the few months following, Larry Hama's *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero* – reaching and passing issue #200 – will be the only G.I. Joe comic. May will bring IDW's *Transformers vs. G.I. Joe*, the latest in the history of crossovers between the popular franchises. And Barber promises a new and unexpected style to the book. "This series will be radically different in tone from anything we've done—from anything anybody is doing, anywhere—and is created out of a deep love and respect for these characters and their place in the history of comics." IDW promises the *G.I. Joe* series will continue on, and continue to take the franchise into exciting new places in the future.

Special thanks to IDW's Chris Ryall and John Barber

AANG'S FUTURE, KORRA'S PAST.

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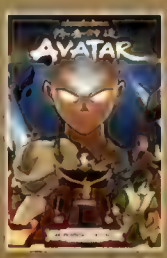
The Art of the Animated Series



The Promise Part 1

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EVERYBODY SHOULD MEET A MUPPET

By Brendon Connelly

The first rule of going behind the scenes of a Muppet movie is that you don't talk about what you see behind the scenes of a Muppet movie. Not really. I mean... just use your imagination. So you might think I'd be somewhat handicapped in telling you what happened when I stopped by the shoot for *Muppets Most Wanted*.

But, actually, not so much. Because as well as all of the scary "Muppet surgery" that I'll never be able to unsee, the felt-flocked charnel house and the shambles scattered with petrified, wide-open ping pong balls, there was plenty that doesn't endanger the magic at all but actually, miraculously, amplifies it.

And then, aside from what I saw, there's all of the interesting stuff I heard, the things I learned from talking to the craftspeople, technicians, filmmakers, and – of course – Muppets that were making the movie. So let's pick up the day after the first couple of hours, when I'd passed all the way through Pinewood's nine sewing circles of Muppet hell and stepped out into a bright, sunny production office, its walls lined with illustrations.

These were samples of the film's production design and Eve Stewart, the woman responsible, was there to talk me through them. "We built a great deal of what you'll see from scratch. We had to find a location that would represent a Russian tundra, somewhere a gulag might well be positioned in a snowy wilderness. We managed to find a snowy airbase up in Gloucestershire and that's where we built all of the prison pens and watch towers and tunnels."

But not everything was built, and there's a lot of location work. Perhaps the most recognisable location is the Tower of London, setting for much of the film's third act. Stewart says that it was actually pretty easy to get permission."We went to the Tower of London and asked and usually they'd say no, but this time we said, 'It's for The Muppets,' so they said, 'We love Kermit even more than James Bond,' and so the drawbridge was lowered."

Not every sequence at the Tower could be shot on location, however, as the all-important jewel room, housing the Crown Jewels, is necessarily out of bounds for security reasons. And there were even restrictions in place that made it hard to replicate the room as a set, Stewart says."We went down there often. You're not allowed to take photographs, you know, so we had to draw really fast in our books, pretending like we were just really interested in what we were looking at."

I was particularly interested in the specific restrictions on production design that come from working with Muppets. Stewart told me that it starts with the palette. "My colour choices have been very particular," she explained, "And I'm very aware of having to show the Muppets off at their brightest and best. So my colours tend to be sludgy, and I tend towards 'Muppet avoidance,' so I won't do any bright greens. It affects the

textures too. Because they're all fleecy guys, I'm trying to constantly do shiny, very textured surfaces. It's all so the Muppets are thrown forward in your visual interest."

Upstairs from Stewarts' office was the wardrobe department, a far bigger slab of studio space with at least four times the footprint but still not much room spare for the visiting press. There were literally hundreds of costumes on racks and hangers, a good number with human proportions but many, many more to Muppet scales.

As soon as I was introduced to Rahel Afiley, the costumer on both *The Muppets* and now *The Muppets Most Wanted*, I got straight to the burning issues. So, what exactly are Piggy's measurements?" I can't tell you, she'd kill me. Or, at best, I'd get fired."

Afiley did feel safe telling me that Piggy has over 20 costume changes in the new movie, including a wedding dress designed by Vivienne Westwood. "Piggy has twice as many costumes as any other character, if not three times. For every country she visits, in this film we go with the theme of the country. So when she was in Spain, we put her in reds and blacks and in Dublin she was in more green tones."

There was a schema on the wall of the wardrobe department showing all the principal Muppets lined up in order of height. It looked like the poster for an incredibly fuzzy remake of *The Usual Suspects*. I can't tell you how tempted I was to risk my own life, or at best job, by popping out my smartphone and taking a snap. But I already knew that I was headed down to the sound stage, where Kermit was shooting a scene and, really, nothing was going to be worth missing the chance to see that.

Funnily enough, when I did get down there, Kermit was between takes and ready to chart and he just happened to bring up the matter of his diminutive stature all by himself. He was filming an exciting, stunt-filled scene on this afternoon, and commenting on how difficult it is being an action man. "Yes, it is, hard because I'm quite small. It's hard to be respected when you're only 18 inches tall and trying to be tough. This is a scene where I land on top of the Tower of London, or at least the Pinewood version. I've just saved Miss Piggy from the clutches of the evil Constantine. This is me doing my best Bruce Willis. And that's why I look like this, with my sleeves rolled up."

Almost the very moment that Kermit mentioned Constantine, the evil frog

appeared on the scene. He's looks very much like Kermit – pay attention to their collars if you really need to tell them apart - but they do sound very, very different. "You close your eyes, and see if you can tell who is me and who is him," Constantine said. I obliged and screwed my eyes tightly.

The unmistakable tones of Kermit the Frog intoned a characteristically humble introduction. "Hello, Kermit the Frog here." Easy. No room for error. It was undeniably Kermit.

And then Constantine spoke."Hi-ye-lo, Keeermet the Frog hee-yar."

"And that," said Kermit, "is why we hired him."

Both Constantine and Kermit were dressed in very smart morning wear. They can't both be getting married can they? "Well, they are wedding outfits," Kermit admitted, "but we're not marrying each other. There's a pig involved."

So who is the best man at this wedding? "I always consider myself the best man," said Constantine. Kermit more generously offered "We don't know yet, but I think it could be Walter."

And again, almost as soon as Kermit spoke his name, Walter appeared. The two frogs headed back to the set to film some more angles of their big, climactic showdown while Walter hung out with me to watch the action. And if I could ever explain what it was like to just hang out with Walter, just casually chit chatting and sharing our love of all things Muppet, I would. But I find it so tough. It sounds impossible, right? Me just chilling with a Muppet, just the two of us, nobody else to interfere or eavesdrop? It doesn't make any sense at all. But I swear to you, that's just how I remember it.

Everybody should meet a Muppet. Not so much so that they will believe I'm not crazy – I don't care about that, really – but because it's the closest thing to actual, real magic that I've ever experienced. I don't remember believing in Santa Claus or Micky Mouse, though I'm assured that I once did, but that's because it all happened when I was about Kermit-height. I'll never forget meeting Kermit, though, or Walter,

because they crossed the same boundaries of the impossible – it's just that they did it on the wrong side of my 40th birthday. And having held real conversations with them both, and other Muppets besides, with all of the attendant body language and non-verbal communication, I don't think I could really convince my subconscious to not believe that Muppets are "real" if I wanted to.

During the takes Walter and I kept quiet, but I did see he was wearing his Kermit watch from the last movie and pointed it out with a smile. He leaned in and whispered, "It's the real one. Check it out." In return, I showed him the Kermit cover on my smartphone.

"Nice one. I've got him on my wrist... and in my heart. Wow. That was really sappy."

So Walter is clearly still the swooning Muppet fan that we met in the last movie. Some things have changed, though. This time he gets to do a lot more action himself and not just wait in the wings, whistling. "I actually get to do some very exciting stunts. For instance, I jump from a moving train. And I do my own stunts, no stunt doubles. Fozzy and Animal got to do it with me and we only got a little bit injured. Just one take, though."

I was curious how appearing in the last Muppet movie had changed Walter's life, plucking him from obscurity and giving him the lead role, driving the story ahead of some established international megastars."Getting recognised is kind of fun actually. I spend most of my time in my apartment when I'm not working, so I don't get recognised that often, but on the set here it's terrific. And it's kind of fun, you know, because before I was totally anonymous, no one ever knew who I was. And now, I'm just trying to do like Kermit says. Kermit sets a really good example. He's just the frog he is. He doesn't let it go to his head."

Yep. Just like I keep telling everybody. If you need a role model, you can't do any better than Kermit the Frog. *The Muppets Most Wanted* is set for release across the US on March 21st and the UK on March 28th.

SOMETIMES IT IS ROCKET SCIENCE

Gene Yang Creates a Seamless World For Avatar: The Last Airbender

By Hannah Means-Shannon

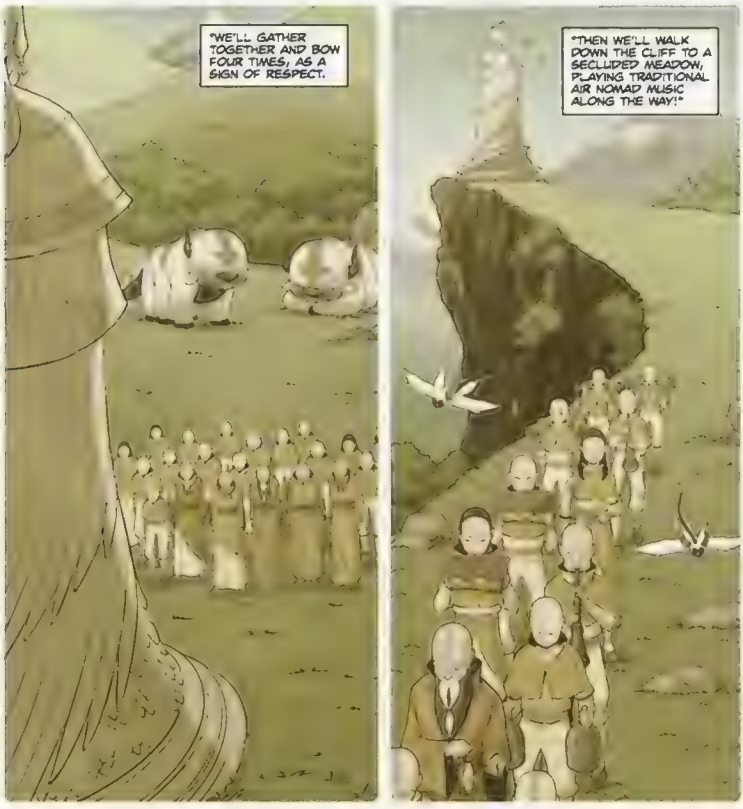
When it comes to introducing a widely established property into a new medium, the old adage usually stands: you can't please all of the people all of the time. Some fans will be pleased to see an extension of their favorite universe into new storylines regardless of the medium, and some may even be pleased to find a new incarnation of characters they follow closely in a format they are already enthusiastic about, but trying to best the successes of the original property on its home turf is almost always a foolish notion. When it comes to the animated series *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, and its sequel *The Legend of Korra*, bringing in the creative team who devised the series to help shape the *Airbender* comic from Dark Horse was one option among many, but an option that hinted at a big picture approach for the property. It indicated that *Airbender* wasn't going to be a comic based on the series, a sideline or derivative of something already successful in pop culture, but an entity capable of standing alongside the animated series as a sister project.

And yet Dark Horse were also prepared to do something we rarely see with a licensed property. Aware that creators Michael DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko were being hailed as animators at the top of their game, the creators and Dark Horse began searching for a voice in comics who was already possessed of a similar stature in their medium. But the comics writer capable of taking on *Airbender* duties needed more than just stature, they also needed to have shown a personal interest in the types of stories the animated series had become known for: psychological tales, social and cultural tales, and tales steeped in mythology and folklore. This was a remarkably tall order, in fact a nearly impossible task. DiMartino and Konietzkoaimed high and entered into "talks" with possibly the only comic writer in the industry who fit the bill, graphic novelist Gene Yang.

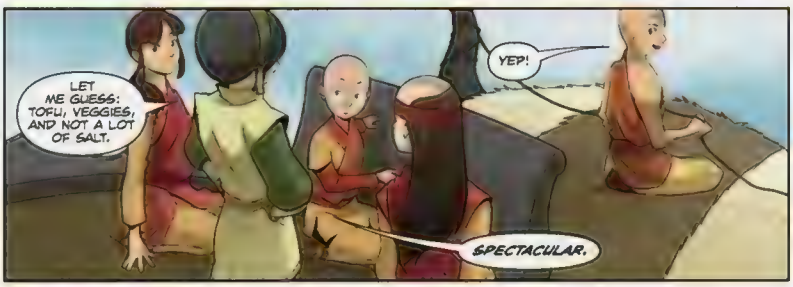
MAN, YOU GUYS ARE GONNA LOVE THIS!
:SIGH: DOUBT IT.
OH, CHEER UP, SOKKA. I'LL HELP YOU SHOP FOR A NEW PURSE WHEN WE GET BACK.
NOT A PURSE, A BAG!
A MANLY, MANLY BAG. TO CARRY MY MANLY, MANLY THINGS.
WE'LL BE SURE TO FIND ONE THAT MATCHES YOUR MANLY, MANLY BELT.
TODAY'S ONE OF THE HIGHEST HOLIDAYS ON THE AIR NOMAD CALENDAR: YANGCHEN'S FESTIVAL! IT'S ALSO ONE OF THE FUNNEST!
IT HASN'T BEEN CELEBRATED IN OVER A HUNDRED YEARS! AND WITH EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED, IT MIGHT'VE BEEN COMPLETELY LOST TO HISTORY IF YANGCHEN HERSELF HADN'T REMINDED ME LAST NIGHT.
AVATAR AANG, PLEASE TELL US MORE!
WHERE ARE WE GOING?
AND WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?
THOSE ACOLYTE KIDS ARE SUPER NICE AND ALL, BUT DON'T THEY SEEM AWFULLY..
EAGER?
YEAH.
WE'RE GOING TO A CLIFF OVERLOOKING THE OCEAN, WHERE THERE'S THIS GIANT STATUE OF A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN! THAT'S WHERE YANGCHEN'S FESTIVAL BEGINS!

Yang's critically acclaimed book *American Born Chinese* is an autobiographically-inspiredstory of growing up as a first generation American in San Francisco and engages with the role and impact of pop culture and mythology on childhood. It's an incredibly personal work that's already well on its way to becoming a universal touchstone for a hybrid cultural experience, and has become a staple of education reading lists that has helped open doors for the use of comics in the classroom. Yang's stature was beyond question, but the fairly obvious question remained: why would someone known for creating their own highly personal stories from scratch want to work with a licensed property heavy on established characters and continuity? What DiMartino and Konietzko had in mind was, in fact, in many ways even more constraining than simply remaining true to the characters and universe established in the animated series: they were interested in further developing characters along established lines, filling in "gaps" in fan knowledge, and also creating storylines that specifically created continuity between *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and *The Legend of Korra*. They needed someone who could craft a story not only in keeping with the animated series, but someone who could bridge continuity between two established, intricate, and serialized stories in another medium. In that context, asking Yang to work on the comic was not exactly a sweet deal, but thankfully Yang didn't see it that way.

Several stars were in alignment to make Yang amenable to taking up such a difficult task. "I am a huge fan of the original cartoon," he told *Bleeding Cool Magazine*, "To my mind, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is the best American-produced cartoon series in existence. The world-building, the character development, and the sheer visual joy of Avatar are above and beyond anything else out there. I love it. My kids love it. Even my wife loves it, and she generally avoids TV animation." Well, excessive fandom is probably one of the best possible foundations for a writer who is about to take up detailed continuity points in the same universe, and of course probably the biggest prerequisite for handing an established world over to a new creator in a new medium is enthusiasm for the original incarnation. The fact that Yang happened to be a "huge fan" was a significant coincidence indeed.


"WE'LL GATHER TOGETHER AND BOW FOUR TIMES, AS A SIGN OF RESPECT.
"THEN WE'LL WALK DOWN THE CLIFF TO A SECLUDED MEADOW, PLAYING TRADITIONAL AIR NOMAD MUSIC ALONG THE WAY!"

Even a seasoned pro like Yang recognized the challenges he was facing when handling the weighty property. He told us rather frankly, "When Dark Horse Comics asked me to write the graphic novel continuation of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, I was both



often two steps forward, one step back. Either Mike or Bryan reads through every outline and every script that I do. The notes I receive from them and the editors at Nickelodeon are incredibly helpful." This confirms that the Dark Horse comic is very much a team book, and this situation is one that Yang prefers rather than an autonomy that might spin the comic out as a kind of parallel *Airbender* world with many of the same features. This has implications for the comic and the show, suggesting that in many ways the two mediums are creating one vast multi-media project with its own organic identity.

excited and scared. I was excited because I was getting invited into this universe I admired so much. I was scared because, well, those were some big shoes to fill. I found the series finale immensely satisfying, so satisfying that it was difficult for me to figure out how to keep things going." Interestingly, having a grip on the past of Airbender was only a good start for Yang, he actually wanted to know the rest of the continuity he was having to work with rather than operating in total freedom. *The Legend of Korra* was in production at the time, and it was appealing to him, rather than limiting, to understand the other half of the bookend he was working with.

Working alongside DiMartino and Konietzko made him feel more confident in creating intermediary events and characterization. "Before I ever came on board, they'd already laid out this rich history of how the world of *The Last Airbender* would become the world of Korra", Yang says. "The big pieces were there. They reminded me that character growth doesn't happen on one continuous upward slope, that it's

The more readers become aware of the way that licensed properties operate in comics, the more they will recognize that each project is unique in the choices it makes to create interrelationships between different forms of media: some comics exist in their own pocket universes where anything goes as long as the major tenets of the original work are not compromised and the characters remain true to reader expectations. Some will, with permission and dialogue from the original creators of the concepts, add small elements to continuity and character that are "new" and then become part of continuity. But few take on the heavy lifting of total continuity building, and even fewer exist as an outlet for establishing continuity that is designed to feed into a major development in the property the way that the *Airbender* comic feeds into *The Legend of Korra*. And the comic had plenty of room and time to do this, which worked in its favor. Over the course of a couple of

years, Yang crafted the stories that became the arc known as "The Promise" and followed that with "The Search."

Fans were in a unique situation of needing to read the comics in order to receive these significant storylines and character developments that would add to their understanding of *The Legend of Korra*. Of course, both the animated series and the comics can be read independently, but the ideal configuration is to watch *The Last Airbender,* then read 'The Promise" and "The Search", then watch *The Legend of Korra*. The story of "The Promise" picks up in the aftermath of war, literally immediately after the end of the first animated series before allowing a year to pass to catch up with characters as they recover from the events of the show. The cultural tensions stirred up by the war have not gone away, in fact, are becoming more pronounced, and there's a danger of relapse into civil conflict between the Fire Nation colony and the Earth Nation. Aang and Zuko are placed in the center of this conflict in concern for future peace, and the comic addresses some sophisticated themes of cultural groups intermingling and new identities forming that cannot easily be dissolved in the interest of clear national divides.

In these elements alone, readers can see Gene Yang's understanding of the social realism typical of the Airbender universe, and his ability to resume the development of characters without missing a beat. Yang comments on the use of such serious themes, "I tried my best to follow the precedence set by the show. *Avatar: The Last Airbender* deals with a lot of weighty topics: war, cultural tensions, the nature of evil. But it does so in kid-friendly way. We tried to do the same with the comics." For inspiration, he looked to the historical context of both Feudal Japan and Japan in the aftermath of World War II, he explains, "We looked at what happened to Japan after its World War II defeat. Japan had to pull its colonies out of neighboring countries like Taiwan and Korea. Many of those colonies had existed for a generation or more, so Japan was asking many of its citizens to leave the only home they had ever known. That's no easy thing." But he was also aware of needing to make the story accessible for younger readers, so counterbalanced the political themes of the story with strong character development. "The Promise" was not only well-received by readers anxious to learn what happened to the characters after the first animated series, but also from new readers who might not have read comics before or comics readers who might be new to the Airbender world. Though Yang had many balls in the air, each was handled with remarkable dexterity to create a multi-faceted success.

While "The Promise" was a very politically-driven story arc, Yang's work on the second major arc, "The Search" offered a closer focus on the internal lives of characters from the show, particularly Zuko and Azula, whose family life was so complicated and mysterious that it more or less demanded an entire graphic novel to explicate. This is another example of how the comic contributes substantially to the Airbender

"AFTERWARDS, WE CAN VISIT AN ISLAND JUST OFF THE COAST, WHERE MONK GYATSO USED TO TAKE ME AND THE OTHER KIDS TO FLY KITES.
"THE WINDS THERE ARE PERFECT!"

universe in a way that creates continuity which alters fan understanding of characters in a permanent way. The brother and sister are caught up in the search for their long-lost mother Ursa, and some of the secrets uncovered for readers are emotionally challenging and also emotionally rewarding. The comic doesn't downplay some of the painful aspects of the Fire Nation's royal family in the least, but one of the ways that Yang counterbalances the family drama is through emphasizing spiritual elements that compliment the quest for reconciliation with the past. "The Search" is an interesting storyline for another reason: it was originally a movie pitch that was passed over in favor of producing *The Legend of Korra* series. Yang was essentially working with elements that were already deemed "continuity" by DiMartino and Konietzko, but had never been released to fans. And yet Yang's choices to balance elements of storytelling in the arc reveal a great deal of personal creativity and vision for the Airbender universe.

Yang's decision to emphasize spiritual aspects of Zuko's quest stemmed from Yang's experience of the show. "The Spirit World was one of my favorite aspects of the original show," he says, "Visually, it lets the artists really cut loose. That's certainly true of 'The Search.' Many of my favorite panels in the books are where Gurihiru drew something spirit-y." But Yang also felt that comics were particularly suited to present these realities, perhaps even more so than animation. "The comics medium lets you dwell. You can read a comic as quickly or as slowly as you want. Many of 'The Search's spirit-y sequences are rich and elaborate, inviting the reader to linger a bit in the Spirit World. In animation, those moments would last a few minutes at most," Yang comments. So, the time-element in comics can alter the way in which fans experience Airbender, and some of its spiritual aspects may be even more at home in comics. Yang concludes, "Comic books allow for a stillness and a timelessness that are difficult to achieve in other visual storytelling media. They can be more contemplative. Maybe that's why I love comics so much."

The complexity of Gene Yang's task is obvious for readers when they experience the comic, but the details behind his effort may be overlooked unless the curtains are pulled back a little on his creative process. For creators, his approach reads like a map to creating good comics based on an established property, and illustrates the reward of setting the bar high and focusing on craftsmanship to make sure fans experience a seamless world of storytelling made richer through its multi-media expansion. Clearly, for Yang, his love for comics and for the animated series were part of the inspiration that made the ambitious undertaking possible, and in the end, highly enjoyable for fans as essential reading.

THE BIGGEST UPCOMING KIDS COMICS OF 2014

By Hannah Means-Shannon

When we predict the "biggest upcoming" comics of the year, and especially regarding kids comics, we recognize a number of factors are in play. When it comes to all-ages comics, not all young readers are capable of purchasing power, and that means that comics which parents have heard about, when combined with a visual appeal that makes kids ask for a comic, create certain goldilocks conditions for successful marketing. These comics contain promising features of both levels of appeal and that sets them up to become the most discussed and circulated kids comics of 2014.

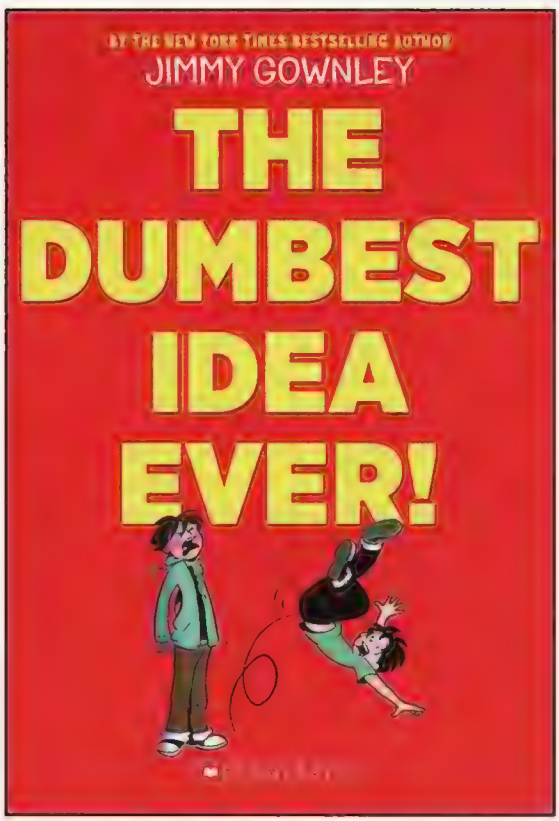
Captain Action Cat: The Time-Stream Catastrophe, by Franco and Art Baltazar, published by Dark Horse/Dynamite Entertainment.

When Franco and Art Baltazar came over from their imprint Aw Yeah Comics! to produce *Itty Bitty Hellboy* for Dark Horse, that was something of a revelation for all-ages comics. In essence, Dark Horse characters were getting the Aw Yeah treatment, and the result was delightful, colorful, and full of inside jokes bound to please Hellboy fans. But that has a limited all-ages audience in those who are particularly engrossed the Hellboy universe. Now Franco and Baltazar are taking on a crossover property with a much wider all-ages appeal, approachable by all new readers while preserving Silver-Age themes and aspects of comic tradition from *Captain Action*. The comic is also going to contain cross-over elements from Dark Horse titles like *Ghost, X, Captain Midnight,* and *The Occultist* while remaining all-ages in content, so it's a title that adults may enjoy as much as younger readers. The appeal of Franco and Baltazar's combination artwork and writing is well-established, from cover-art to interiors, making the comic a total package of allure likely to substantially out perform *Itty Bitty Hellboy* due to its broader net of content. And it features cats, a perennial seller when it comes to all-ages comics. What more could you ask for?

The Dumbest Idea Ever, written and illustrated by Jimmy Gownley, published by Scholastic Inc.

The Dumbest Idea Ever was also making the review rounds when it was announced that an excerpt of the all-ages graphic novel would be debuting as a Free Comic Book Day offering, and the fact that the book is being published by Scholastic means that it will have quite a reach in engaging readers in school environments. It not only handles middle-school themes but breaks the fourth wall of comics by presenting the autobiographical birth of a comic book artist and encourages the development of artistic talent as a way of finding identity

at a formative age. It's a realistic story of gumption, the romance of comics, and the possibility that dreams really do come true for young people, so it's bound to become a touchstone for artistically-inclined young readers and a book that educators and adults will hand-select as suggested reading to promote comic art for a new generation. *The Dumbest Idea Ever* also fills a niche in the young teen market rather than leaving age-appeal nebulous, and that's a market often looking for very specific titles that address teen issues. Another plus is that it introduces the graphic novel format to readers skilled enough to handle long-form works who want to be challenged by format and content as they move into more sophisticated texts. Gownley may emerge as the Judy Blume of comics, particularly as he bares his own teenage soul for readers.



***A Piggy's Tale: The Adventures Of A 3-legged Super-Pup*, published by Bohemian Press, written by TodEmko and illustrated by Ethan Young.**

Piggy first appeared on the Kickstarter radar of comics news sites in late 2013, and for those who gave it more than a cursory glance, the comic became the subject of substantial discussion. Firstly, it is drawn by an established indie comics artist who has garnered critical praise for his development of web comics and ventures into print handling animal themes and multi-cultural semi-autobiographical elements in his series *Tails*. Ethan Young's talent as an artist is so firmly established, particularly in his often stunning clear-line work that seeing him turn his abilities to an all-ages comic generated interest. But the subject-matter of *A Piggy's Tale* meant strong Kickstarter support, particularly from ideologically-minded parents since the comic is inspired by the true story of a real "Piggy" the rescue dog

and the comic is geared toward raising awareness of animal disability and animal needs while supporting a message of indomitability in the selfless service of others. It also taps into superhero traditions which give it the feel of a "classic" comic from the outset and with its hero and side-kick setup, each issue has a solid rescue-adventure storyline that makes for manageable episodic reading for young comic enthusiasts. *A Piggy's Tale* combines appealing story-telling, characters, and themes from its inception that make it a comic kids will ask for but parents will also seek out and feel good about buying and supporting. It's one of those rare, obvious win-win books and has the potential to take 2014 by storm.

***Poppy! And The Lost Lagoon*, published Dark Horse, written by Matt Kindt and illustrated by Brian Hurtt.**

The announcement that *Poppy! And The Lost Lagoon* would be the first in a series of graphic novel from the New York Times Best-Selling writer and artist Matt Kindt and New York Times Best-Selling artist Brian Hurtt generated immediate furor in the comics world and also in the world of kids comics, if not children's literature as a whole. Matt Kindt is known for his homage to pulp literature, particularly spy tradition, through his ever-expanding series *Mind MGMT*, and his work on Valiant Comics titles gradually increased his reach even further into mainstream comics. His wasn't the first name readers would have associated with kids comics, however, his enthusiasm for globe-trotting characters and colorful near-folktale elements as well as mysterious phenomena meant that as soon as the announcement was made, his work on a children's series seemed like a no-brainer. Brian Hurtt's promotional art for the first graphic novel is also an eye-catching combination of whimsical elements, crowded, detailed panels and mysterious line-work that sets the tone well for an adventure series where heroine Poppy sets off on global treasure-hunting. Dark Horse secured the international rights to the series right away, and seems firmly committed to a long-running series of graphic novels. This book will hit the library charts quickly and become as popular in the classroom as in kids' backpacks. 2014 is destined to be the year of Poppy!

***Rocket Raccoon*, published by Marvel Comics, written by Joe Caramagna, with art by Adam Archer and cover art by Ron Lim and Richard Isanove.**

Rocket Raccoon is appearing as a zero issue for Free Comic Book Day 2014. While there's no ironclad proof that a series is forthcoming from Marvel, books that are given a zero-issue designation are earmarked for ongoing series work. If *Rocket Raccoon* does become an ongoing series then it will rival books like *Adventure Time* and *My Little Pony* in sales because it takes part in the Marvel superhero universe tying into the upcoming *Guardians of the Galaxy* film and merchandizing that's bound to spin out of the film release. We might also add to that the nostalgia value for adults who are fans of the *Guardians of the Galaxy* comic, revived in 2013, and the fact that this superpowered alien animal is simply adorable and irascible. Marvel's decision to release large plush Rocket Raccoon dolls at New York Comic Con in 2013 caused a purchasing frenzy and made it the must-have item of the con. It's not a complicated equation: most fans of superhero comics have a soft spot for Rocket and he's easily marketed to

children. Hopefully the writing and art on the book will be impressive and justify the furor it's bound to inspire. We don't know if the FCBD designated writer and artists will be assigned to the full series, but if they are, things are looking promising for a quality comic.

***Scribblenauts Unmasked: A Crisis of Imagination*, published by DC Comics, written by Josh Elder, with art by Adam Archer.**

The *Scribblenauts* digital-first comic is coming to print this spring, and exists as a spin-out from the incredibly popular all-ages DC Comics video game *Scribblenauts: Unmasked* released in 2013. The premise of the comic, like the game, is that main character Maxwell is able to move through DC Comics locales and employ writing to conjure up the help of any conceivable DC character, but the locations and the characters are given an all-ages treatment to make them appropriate to any player or reader. The links between gaming and digital comics for this property are a significant reminder of the future of all-ages comics in their multi-media context. Kids can play the game, read the comic digitally, or receive print editions, all while remaining within the same DC Comics universe which will familiarize them with DC characters and concepts that may prompt further explorations into more mature comics further down the road. *Scribblenauts* openly promotes the creative activity of writing and preserves a strong adventure-based storyline that interacts with superhero traditions in a playful way. Because the comic can potentially engage with any DC characters or locations, the variety of stories possible will continue to be one of the biggest selling features of the comic, alongside its potential as a digitally-accessible reading experience connected to gaming.

A VALIANT NEW ERA: *X-O MANOWAR* AND *UNITY* IN THE ARMOR WARS CROSSOVER

By Gavin Lees

A VALIANT NEW ERA: *X-O MANOWAR* AND *UNITY* IN THE ARMOR WARS CROSSOVER

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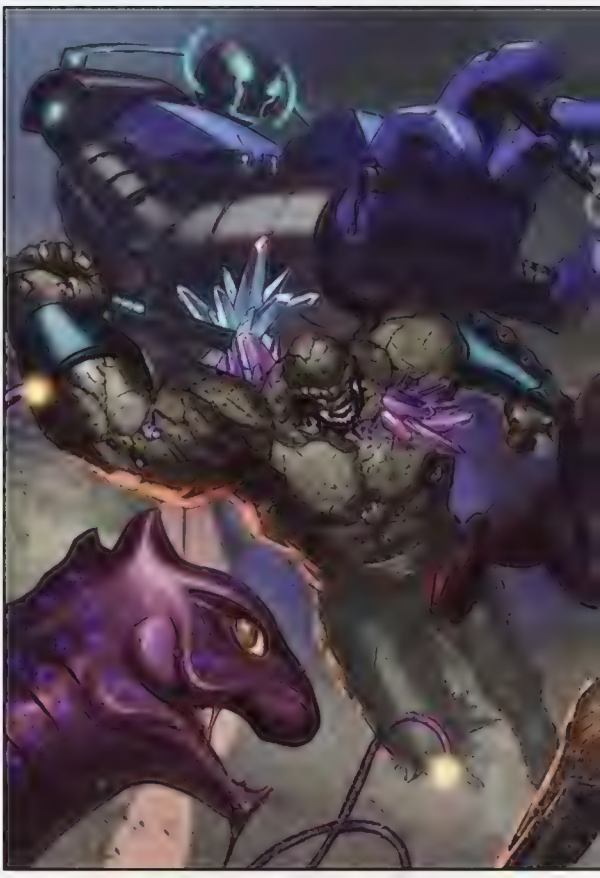
Last autumn, X-O Manowar faced his greatest challenge when the Valiant Universe's most formidable warriors united to destroy him. This summer — kicking off on Free Comic Book Day — writer Robert Venditti and artist Doug Braithwaite will push him to his absolute limits in the crossover series *Armor Hunters*.

Expanding upon the universe built by Venditti in the ongoing *X-O Manowar* series and grown by Matt Kindt in the *Unity* team book, *Armor Hunters* sees the ironic fate of Aric of Dacia twist even further. When he donned the X-O armor, he thought it would bring peace to the world, and quell the warring factions of Earth. Now, however, an intergalactic band of hunters have tracked him to his home world, and will stop at nothing to destroy the armor he wears — even if it means obliterating the entire planet. While once the armor was Aric's safe haven — making him nearly indestructible — now it becomes the source of his strife, and also his only chance of survival. It's a realisation that will test Aric not only physically, but mentally, as his medieval notions of warfare and militaristic might are called into question by the advanced technology and morality of alien races, showing just how vulnerable and uncivilised he really is.

The armor has been the source of much mystery throughout the character's history in the revived Valiant Universe. Although Aric stole it from the Vine race, who had held him captive, there have been hints that its history is more complex, and of a different origin than we might expect. There is also the ongoing enigma of why the suit — a sentient being in its own right — chose an embittered, bloodthirsty Visigoth warrior as a worthy host. All these questions and more will be answered in *Armor Hunters*, and the repercussions will be felt across the entire Valiant line.

If it seems like Aric is becoming the Wolverine of the Valiant Universe with now three titles that revolve around him, there is a very good reason for that. Dinesh Shamdasani, CEO of Valiant, says that it was planned from the very start. "Aric of Dacia's journey from the fifth century to the modern day puts him at an interesting parallel with readers who just discovering Valiant for the first time. Let me put it like this — we first meet Aric around 400 A.D. — a time period that we know well, and that corresponds to our own understanding of history. He's taken by the alien race called the Vine and, when he returns, not only have 1,600 years passed but the world is also now an incredibly dangerous and colorful place full of ultra-powered beings not unlike himself. He doesn't know what the Harbinger



Foundation is, or who Ninjak is supposed to be. That makes him the perfect gateway to springboard out all these incredible Valiant concepts."

One of the biggest reveals of the series will be that Aric is not alone, and that there are several X-O Manowar suits across the universe (and we're not just talking about the USA luge team, either). Each of these has destroyed a culture, and those cultures have spawned a vengeful champion intent on ridding the universe of every suit of X-O armor — these are the Armor Hunters. With their introduction, it's not only Aric who must reassess his worldview, but also the reader. How can we root for someone who wields a weapon so powerful and so dangerous as to inspire such a cull? How far do our own notions of good and evil apply on such a galactic scale? And how would we feel about an Aric bereft of the very technology that makes him exceptional?

This crisis of character actually provides a clear jumping-on point for new readers, as it neatly sumarises who Aric is. As editor Warren Simons teases, "Early on in the story, you'll be meeting a previous bearer of the X-O Manowar armor on another planet and get to see his earliest interaction with the Armor Hunters first hand. That'll set the tone of what's to follow and, by the time we get to Earth, things are going to ramp into high gear right away. We're trying to give *Armor Hunters* the sense of scale you get when you sit down for a big summer blockbuster — everything and everyone you need to know will clearly be explained by the time X-O Manowar throws his first punch."

To really emphasise the intergalactic nature of the conflict, some incredibly creative design work has gone into the Armor Hunters themselves. Realised by Clayton Crain, they are a perfect fusion of his insect-like work on *Carnage* and the industrial mechanics of his *Transformers* art. The hunter that the reader will no doubt latch onto is the giant robot, who stands four times as tall as any of the others, with a deadpan emoticon of a face. It's a somewhat surreal and gothic touch to the series that, while presenting numerous opportunities for the story, will also demand some truly epic framing on the page.

Capably handling the art duties on this series is Doug Braithwaite. Already a fan favourite from his stellar, painterly work on Marvel's *Journey Into Mystery*, his work on *X-O Manowar* and *Unity* has made him one of the key architects of the Valiant universe. Avoiding some of the easy clichés of action and science fiction art, Braithwaite's grandiose style makes the reader feel like they are in the midst of a Cecil B. DeMille film. Like those historical epics, we will be stunned by some of the spectacle that's unleashed on the page, but at their heart, they are ultimately driven by character and our attachment to a noble, yet flawed hero.

The style speaks to who Aric is as a character — someone disjointed from time, straddling the ancient and the futuristic — as well as giving weight and import to his actions and inner emotions. It's often hard to find this level of storytelling in the art of a monthly, mainstream title, but Braithwaite pulls it off with aplomb.

The art is not the only epic aspect of this series, however, as the story with crossover between the *Armor Hunters* miniseries as well as the ongoing *X-O Manowar* and *Unity* titles. This called for some close collaboration between the Valiant team, from writers Venditti and Kindt, and the editorial team, Warren Simons and Dinesh Shamdasani. While many summer crossover events can demand a lot from readers, in terms of extra commitment to buying more titles, the Valiant team strove to ensure that every part of the story would work either on its own, or as part of the ongoing series, as well as knitting together as a larger, cohesive story. This may seem like an almost insurmountable task, but this is an event that has been planned for over a year, and readers may find themselves pleasantly surprised as subplots and story threads from the last ten issues are suddenly brought together in shocking, yet satisfying ways.

Part of the organic ease with which the story develops is down to the close relationship between Venditti and Kindt. By keeping the scope of the crossover relatively small (in publishing terms) the writers were able to steer its direction with confidence. Much like a conversation (or a really intense game of Fiasco) the two were able bounce ideas back and forth, and take equal ownership of the story — unlike other crossovers where writers often find themselves marginalised by the ego and influence of a "star" creator. Simons sees that being one of the key strengths of the publisher, "The Valiant Universe is new enough entity that we've never actually encountered an event of *Armor Hunters*' scale before, and many of our biggest characters still haven't met each other yet. That's where some of the novelty comes from, but our goal is to build accessible, action-packed stories that leverage the strength of a shared universe."

Both writers have their roots in indie comics — Kindt with *Super Spy* and *Pistolwhip*; Venditti with his *Surrogates* series — so this level of independence came naturally to them. Of course, they have also both worked with Marvel and DC in recent years on titles like *Suicide Squad* and *Green Lantern*. Although this gave them time to hone their craft on ensemble cast storylines,

these properties are very much driven by editorial edict. With Valiant, rather than hire writers to flesh-out ideas from a brain trust, the writers were first asked to pitch their ideas before being set to work on a title. Without a spark of creativity to drive the series, the editors just weren't interested, a position that's more akin to independent publishers.

Indeed, Kindt describes the process of working on the characters as almost like creator-owned work. Although the Valiant characters are company properties, and have well-established histories from their previous incarnations in the '90s, the new Valiant universe has not relied overly on nostalgia and fan-service. As such, there has been a tremendous amount of freedom afforded to the creators to take the characters in radical new directions. The one tease about the new *X-O Manowar* is in its very title — this is a book about a suit of armour and, although Aric is the one who wears it currently, there is no certainty that will always be the case. With the approach of the Armor Hunters, his position looks even more precarious.

Getting past the armour has been one of the highlights of Venditti's take on the character. The superheroics, space aliens, and impossible technology have been almost a sideshow to understanding who Aric is as a person. The ensemble cast that has grown around him also appear as fully-formed characters, helping to reflect and cast into relief the inner workings of the central hero. It's this dramatic approach that has really impressed Valiant's editors, and Simons calls his writing "some of the most nuanced and sophisticated in comics today." Not only that, but its unpredictability — "Rob has done some absolutely crazy things with this character over the past two years as well. He cut off Aric's hand in issue two after all! What he has in store for us in the pages of *Armor Hunters #1* is probably one of the most devastating; most ruthless things I've ever seen go down in a comic book."

For fans that can't wait until summer to see how this all unfolds, Valiant has something to tide them over. Their offering for this year's Free Comic Book Day, on Saturday 3rd May, will be a special #1 of *Armor Hunters* with exclusive story pages, as well as interviews with the associated creators, and behind-the-scenes looks at the character designs. For many publishers, this increasingly-popular event is little more than a promotional giveaway, and their offerings consist of little more than

cut-down versions of already-published titles. For Valiant to use it as the launch for a major company event speaks to the level at which they are trying to engage a new readership and offer an easy way in to their line of titles.

They will also have the *Valiant Universe Handbook* on offer, providing all the background that new readers need to know about the characters. For all the popularity of digital comics, and the ease with which readers can download (legally or otherwise) several issues at one time, the comic shop is still the gateway that new readers will pass through. That would appear to be why Valiant places so much value on FCBD's potential, as Publisher Fred Pierce states, "Valiant is extremely conscious of making its comics accessible as possible to new readers. And Free Comic Book Day is something that we aim to take of advantage of on that front each and every year — it's a great opportunity to impress new readers, and we try to make each book a comprehensive introduction to what we're up to in a given year."

As the Valiant Universe continues to expand this year — with the reintroduction of Rai and Doctor Mirage, among others — the future seems bright for the company. Like last year's Summer of Valiant, this year will see Valiant First — a wave of new series debuts that not only includes *Armor Hunters,* but *Armor Hunters: Bloodshot,* and *Armor Hunters: Harbinger* which take the story into new titles with whole new possibilities. Valiant First is a combination of new ongoing series, mini-series, and unlikely team-ups (*Archer & Armstrong* meet *Quantum & Woody* anyone?) all are designed to give new readers easy, accessible jumping-on points into the Valiant line.

Aside from the familiar faces from the '90s, Shamdasani also has his eye on the future and all-new tent pole characters — "A few entirely new characters that never existed at the original Valiant will be getting promotions. The Generation Zero characters, who first appeared in last year's *Harbinger Wars* mini-series, are a great example of that. They'll be stepping front and center and taking over the lead role for the *Armor Hunters: Harbinger* title in July. We've all been itching to give that team their due and *Armor Hunters* was just too good an opportunity to resist."

Armor Hunters launches with a special #1 on Free Comic Book Day, and will continue in its own four-part series starting in June. The storyline will spill over in *X-O Manowar* #25 and *Unity* #8, also in June, and *Armor Hunters: Bloodshot* and *Armor Hunters: Harbinger* beginning in July.

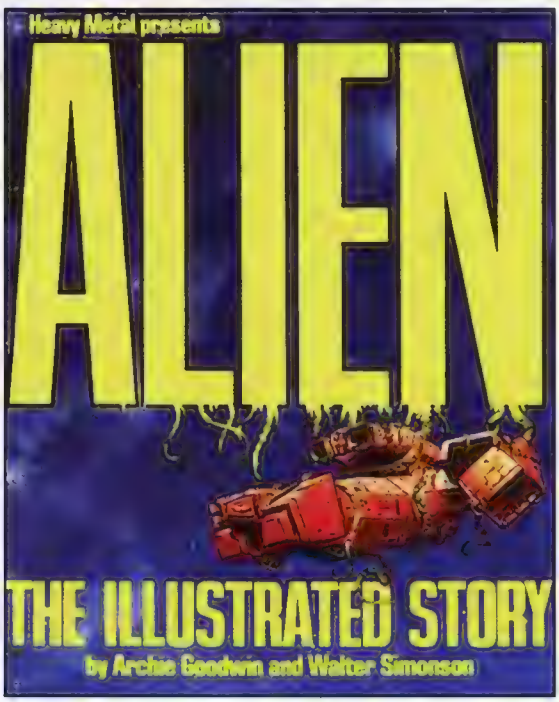
COMICS AREN'T FOR KIDS ANYMORE. BUT SHOULDN'T THEY BE?

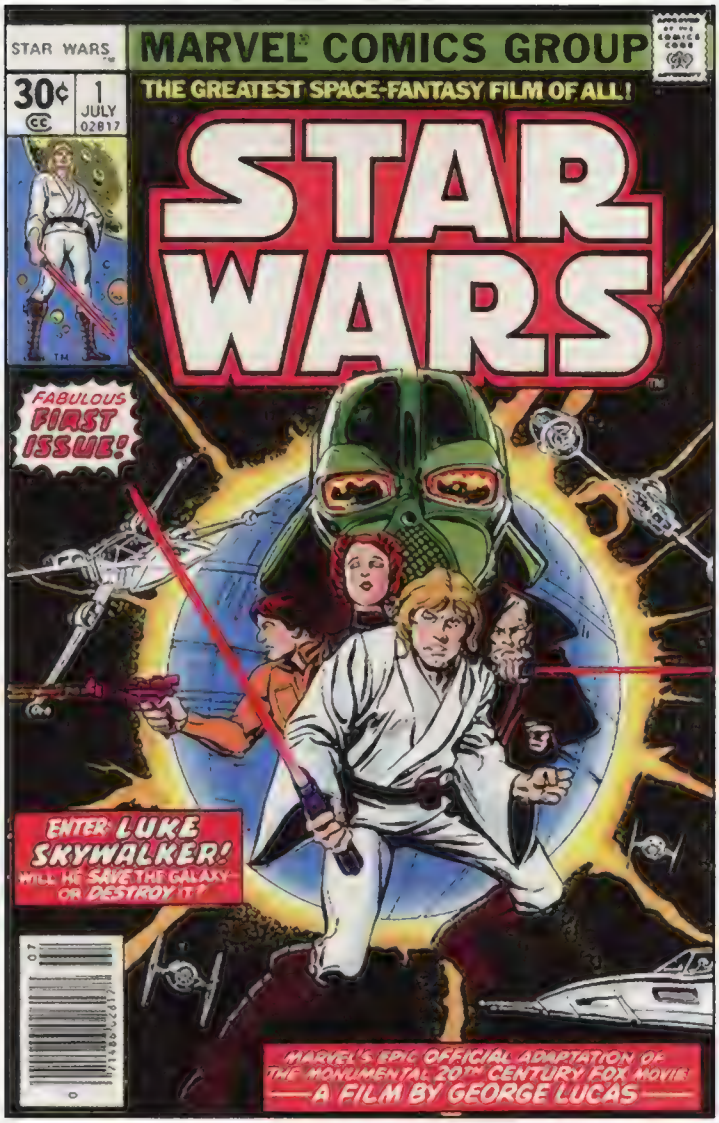
By Rich Johnston

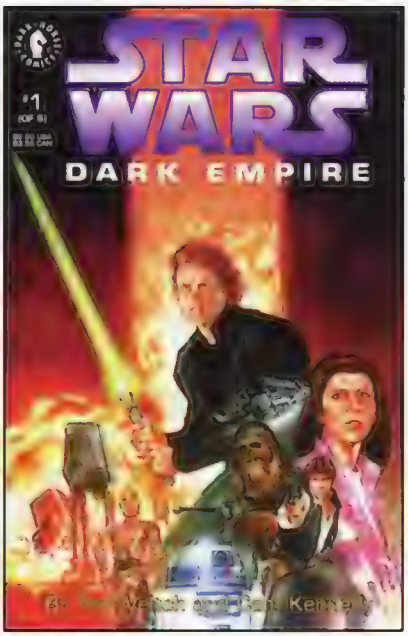
Once upon a time, every comic book was for kids. Or it was at least considered suitable for children, as millions of adults read them too. Or if it was not suitable, then at least it was not causing them harm. Or not too much harm, anyway. Superheroes, crime thrillers, horror, western, romance, nurses, cartoon animals, the traditions of pulp fiction played out across the four coloured newsprint. *Superman, Famous Funnies, True Crime, Tales From The Crypt, Mickey Mouse*...all coalesced into this form in the United States Of America. It spread across the globe, finding fans across Europe, across Africa, South America, Asia and East Asia, each creating them anew for their own population. *Donald Duck* settled in Scandinavia, France brought forth *Asterix* and *Tintin*, Japan found *Astro Boy*, Britain had *The Beano* and *The Dandy*, loved by kids and adults alike.

But then came the fear that comics were rotting our brains, or more importantly the brains of our children. Fredick Wertham published the now-discredited evidence that linked children with juvenile delinquency and the comics industry. The Senate was looking for a sacrificial goat. This would not do and the mighty comics publishers threw one of their own under the bus. They created a self-regulating system called The Comics Code which aimed itself squarely at the horror and crime publications of EC Comics and William Gaines. Its goal was to make sure comics fare was intended solely for kiddies in the USA. While the French and Japanese comics industry grew more diverse in the maturity of the comics they were producing, and even the Brits managed to find the spooky and the gross for kids with *Action* and *2000AD*, in the USA adult comics were restricted to the underground comix scene.

And the Licensed Comic began to flourish, popular films and television shows, comedians, given their own spinoff series, from *The Addams Family* to *I Love Lucy* to *The Man From UNCLE* to *Abbot And Costello*. As well as the code, the sign of an already known license was all a parent needed to be safe and secure with their younglings' choice of reading material.







Goonies.

Marvel's Star line was a series of licensed comics from different places, aimed at the very young, with *Muppet Babies*, *Strawberry Shortcake*, and joined by *Spider-Ham* and the original *Planet Terry*. Marvel also had the likes of *Transformers* and *GI Joe*. This was at a time when comics were sold on every newsstand and adverts for the comics were running in the ad breaks of the cartoons – something frowned upon today – it was an easy sell. But they were considered the runt of the publishing line, large sales being no match for the comics industry equivalent of being sent to the Siberian salt mines.

It wasn't long before films began to be adapted as comic books, in this era before easy access to video tapes, DVDs, Blu Ray, and downloads. Comics became a cheap and cheerful ways to re-experience a film, or provide a comparable experience for those who couldn't afford a cinema ticket. As Hollywood began to rediscover the genre action adventure, inspired by earlier pulp adventure cinema, such as *Star Wars, Indiana Jones,* and *Flash Gordon*, the comics were on hand to do their best reproduction job. *V For Vendetta*'s David Lloyd drew the *Time Bandits* adaptation, Walt Simonson drew *Alien*, and everything went into the mix through the eighties, from *The Last Starfighter* to *The*

The birth of what would become the modern comics franchise license was happening elsewhere in what was then regarded as the small press… Something to be envied and respected, the change came from two smaller companies, Dark Horse Comics and Innovation.

Best known at the time for publishing an anthology, *Dark Horse Presents* featuring creator owned or creator participant comics,

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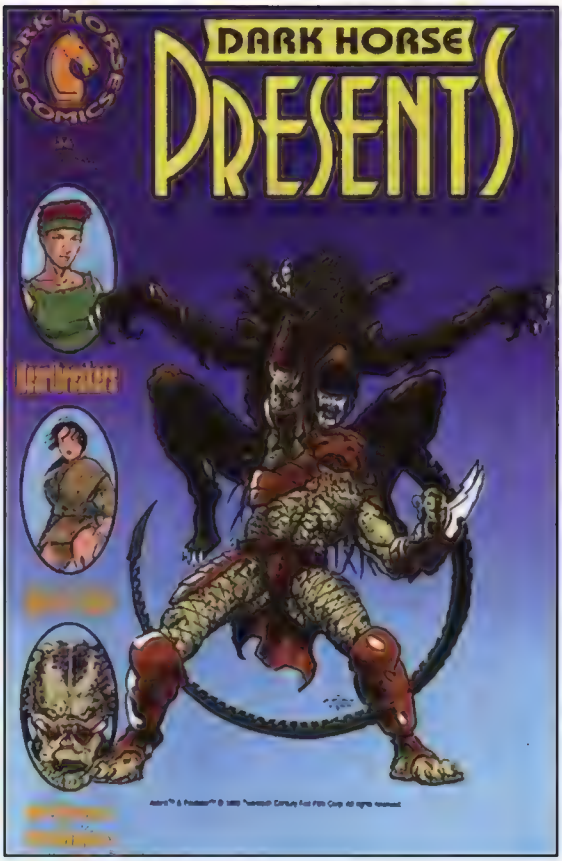


it was something new when Dark Horse got the Aliens license, closely followed by Predator and then Star Wars. At the time, Star Wars was considered a dud of a comics license, Marvel having sucked the juice out of it over a decade. But Dark Horse took the same approach they had with Aliens and Predator, telling adult stories of wartime using the Star Wars backdrop, in the *Dark Empire* series. The comic shop attending audience loved it, as a nostalgia following began to develop.

Innovation also had some success with their line of adaptations. Less critically acclaimed than Dark Horse, they "innovated" with painted pages to reproduce images seen on television and film, and focussed on adaptations, such as *Nightmare On Elm Street, Quantum Leap,* and *Beauty And The Beast.*

These approaches were a revelation and made every publisher look at their own licenses in comparison. The licensed comic, rather than a simple spinoff to get some movie dollars into comics, something seen as less important than the publishers main titles, something for the junior staff to work on, could now be the backbone of a publisher. And rather than appealing to the just the younger kids, could find a wider audience.

But, as more comics were based on TV shows and films, so something switched. More TV shows and films were being based on comics. And again Dark Horse was leading the field in a diverse availability of comics making the move, some more successfully than others. *Timecop, The Mask, Dr Giggles, Barb Wire, Hellboy, Mystery Men, Sin City, 300,* and more over the years. And Dark Horse's imaginative use of the Aliens and Predator licenses into *AVP* was eagerly picked up by the movie franchises as well.

But, as everything tends to, things got in a bit of a rut. The licensed comics began to drift down the chart, comics publishers didn't chase them as much, there was less

demand, the books attracted lesser talent and publishers, and things started to drop off again.

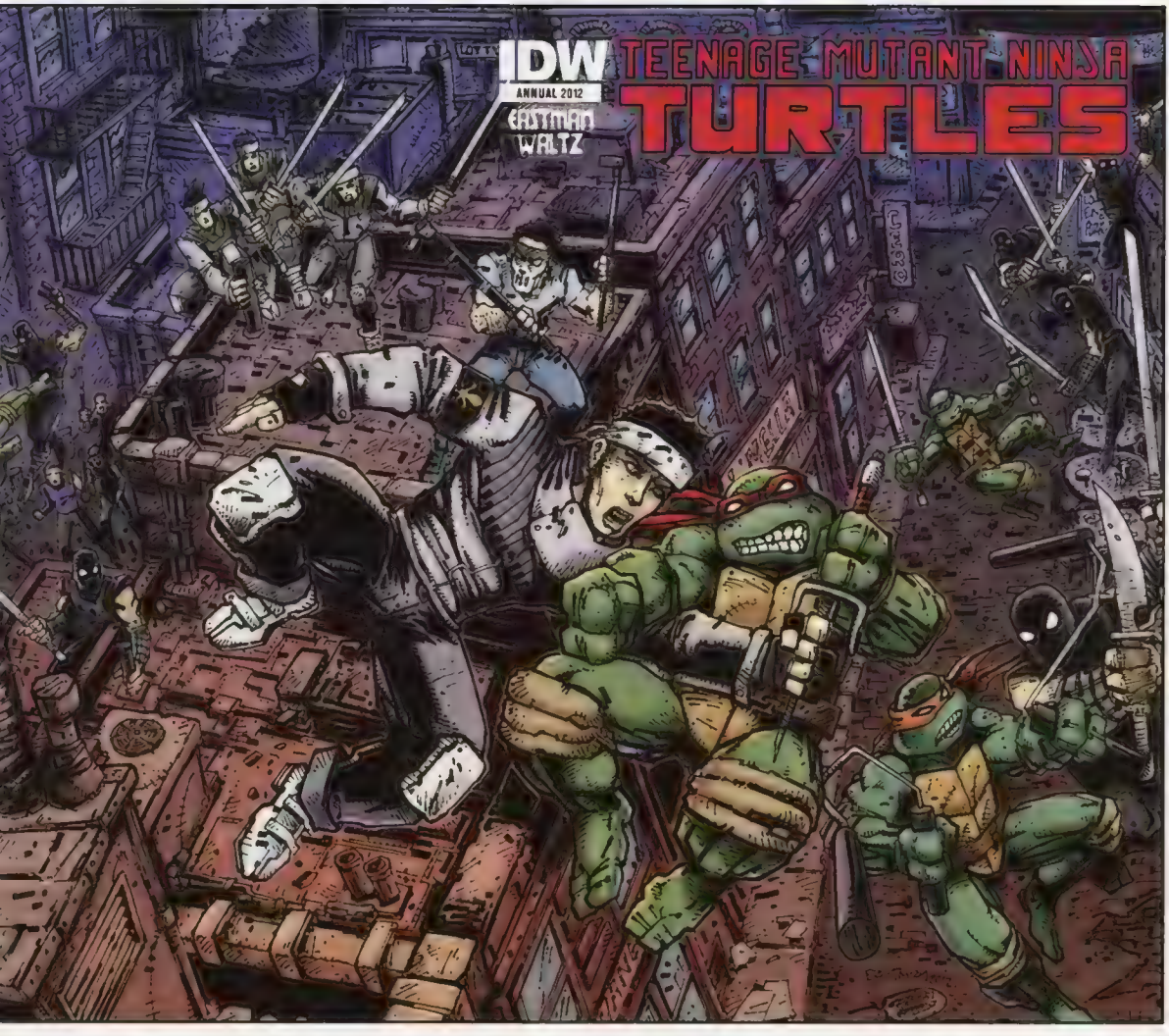
But things also tend to come round. So when Marvel turned down the chance to get the Transformers license from Hasbro again, Pat Lee jumped in with his own publisher, Dreamwave. This saw *Transfomers* launch at the very top of the charts and stay there for some time as well. Indeed the success of this comic may have also spearheaded the film revival.

On its back, we also got *GI Joe* from Devil's Due and *Thundercats* from Wildstorm, all making serious inroads into the comic book charts. Drawing from a number of sources, they attempted to tell more mature stories, tales of war, battle, and combat, rather than the saccharine source material. The Marvel UK *Transformers* comic was mined for tone as much as it was material and, while not exactly saying goodbye to the all ages model, they did tell tales that the younger readers might have found, well, a bit dull. They hit things, there were explosions, but there was also a lot more talking.

But as soon as it came, they began to falter. Pat Lee's various companies went bankrupt, owing Transformers owners over a million dollars, to the extent that his name may not be even mentioned at Hasbro.

Licensed comics needed a savior, and they got it in IDW. Chris Ryall, editor-in-chief at that publisher is very proud of the work there and gave me his own potted history of the form. "I think IDW has been in large measure responsible for helping raise the readers' expectations for licensed comics," he said humbly. "As much as there were some great licensed comics back when I was growing up (everyone who has had even a casual conversation with me knows of my love of *Rom* and *Micronauts*), the bar has been raised by what we've done, by what Dark Horse has done, and just with comic storytelling and art in general. Back in the day, licensed comics weren't given the same level of attention by publishers who also had their own stable of characters. But we've always treated our licensed comics with the same importance as anything else--put the best possible teams on the comics."

But surely things had changed since then, from the licensors' point of view as well as the publisher? Ryall commented on the changing landscape, "Licensors have gotten more savvy and permissive in what they'll allow, and we all have the benefit of having seen these past efforts and what

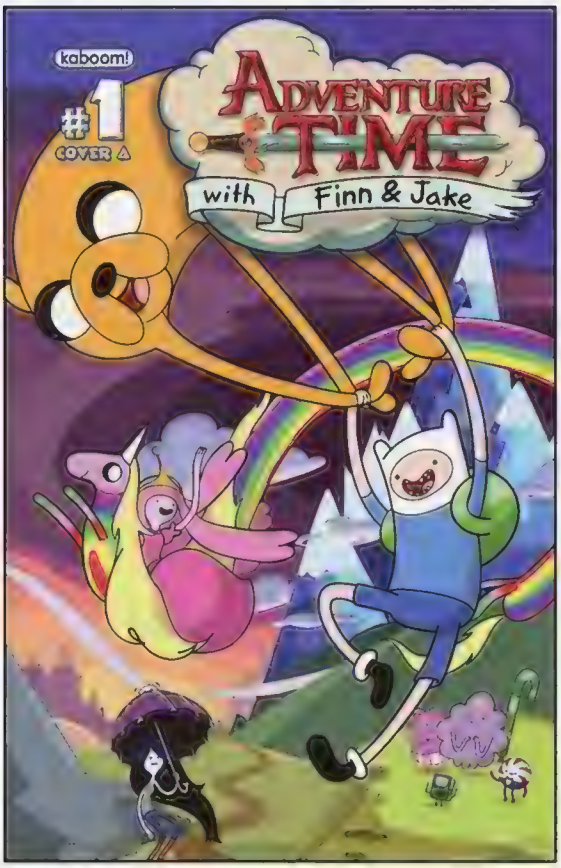


worked and what didn't. Not to mention Internet culture has allowed us all to hear more directly from fans as to what they like and don't - a double-edged sword, sure, but there's a lot to be gleaned from fan comments. I lurked on a number of Transformers message boards while we were developing our initial plans to really get a handle on what people liked and hated about past efforts."

"Finally, creators of properties have seen the benefit to doing comics that tie in with their books/TV shows/movies. Having a Joss Whedon or a Joe Hill tell comic stories gives them a relevancy that some past licensed books just never had."

But for that innovation, you really had to turn to Dark Horse and B*uffy Season Eight*, taking a cancelled show and continuing it through comics, either written by or under the careful eye of those who created the TV shows. IDW did he same with their *Angel* comic and before you knew it we had *X-Files Season Ten* and *Smallville Season Eleven* on the shelves, with Marvel giving us a *Dexter* series from the original author, and DC giving us a *Django Unchained* adaptation by the original producer. These weren't just licensed comics. These were uber-licensed comics. And they didn't just have to stay in each other's worlds.

Where Dark Horse innovated with *AVP* and the still-remarkable *Robocop Vs Terminator*, IDW looked to the next level by finding a way to crossover even more worlds, with their Infestation series moving



through *Transformers*, *GI Joe*, *Ghostbusters*, and more, and *X-Files Conspiracy* taking the Lone Gunmen into the world of the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *The Crow*, as well as giving us *Mars Attacks Judge Dredd*, *Mars Attacks KISS*, even *Mars Attacks Popeye*, and the bestselling *Star Trek/Doctor Who* comic.

It was Boom! Studios, however, that found a way to grab the youngest readers as well as the older, and get rather large sales in the process, as well as utilising the most unlikely of creator bases. After publishing a number of Disney Comics and getting the amazing Roger Langridge to create a series of critically acclaimed *Muppets* comics, they struck gold licensing the cartoon *Adventure Time* as a comic book and took everyone by surprise at the demand for new work. Added to that, they sought out small press creators, webcomic creators, whose work hadn't been seen by a more mainstream audience before but was entirely suited to the *Adventure Time* look and feel, something

they have continued with *Bravest Warriors* and *Regular Show*.

But it would be IDW who would take that approach and get one of the bestselling comics in the industry out of it, with *My Little Pony*, a comic that has found a truly international audience and launched their Micro-Packs of comics that Ryall mentioned, aimed at toy stores and grocery stores. And an easy buy for the burgeoning Brony marketplace.

Ape Entertainment also found huge success... just not in print. By creating comics based on the *Pocket God* app, they found an audience willing to buy whatever *Pocket God* things you threw at them. And while the comic sold a few thousand in print, in digital, it sold a million. Something that IDW looks like they'll be trying to replicate with the upcoming *Angry Birds* comics - which will likely sell even more. And maybe even

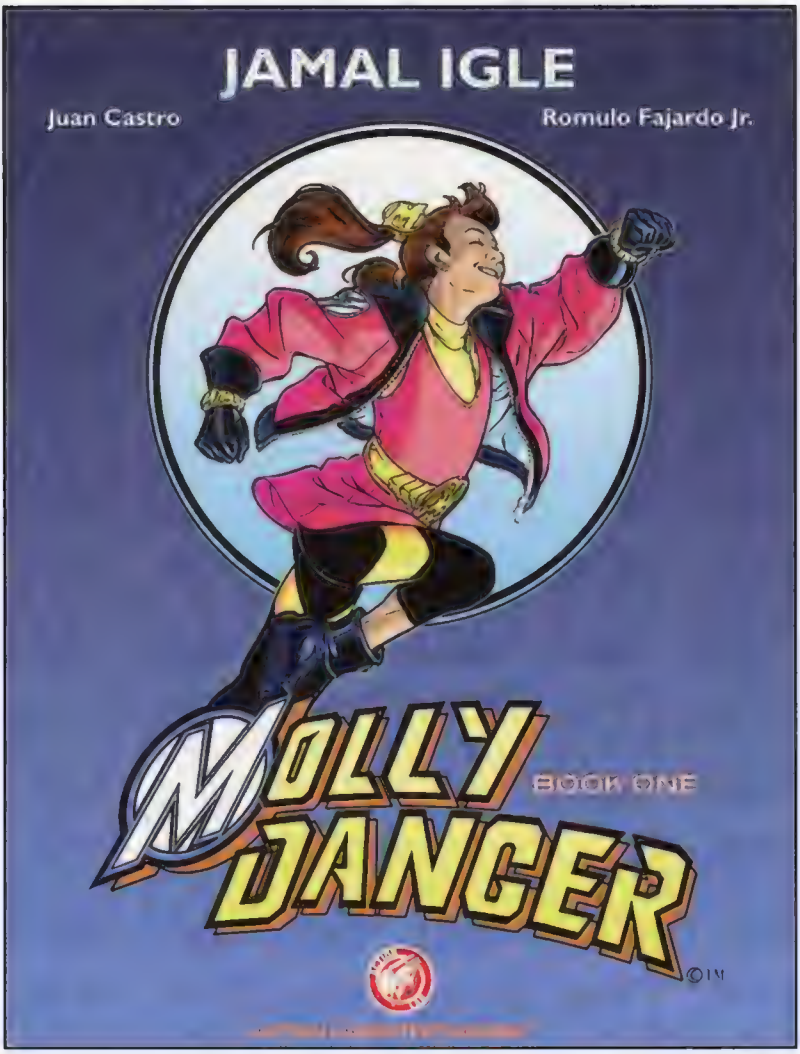
in print as well, *Angry Birds* has a following that surpasses all other app based games.

So how do publishers deal with that duality of audience? Creating comics ostensibly for children but in the knowledge that a large part of their consumer base are adults, possibly trying to recapture their youth, but also looking to be addressed as an adult as well.

Chris Ryall, editor-in-chief of IDW, told me "we try to tell stories and have fun art that appeals to both kids and adults, so that whoever reads them, they'll find something to enjoy. And we take great strides to get the comics that have an intended younger audience to those readers even if they don't go to comic stores: the comics are up at iBooks, ComiXology, and other digital outlets, sold through Scholastic, and we've now even created a new category in the form of our Micro-Comic Fun Packs that are sold at mass retail outlets. So I'd say these comics are being read by children as well as adults, not primarily adults. But ultimately, it comes down to content -- is the story and art appealing to readers of any age? If so, then we've done what we set out to do."

Archie Comics CEO John Goldwater told me about how they take comics and extend the story possibilities. "We have to walk a fine line between telling the traditional fun Archie story, which is aimed at the young reader, and sprinkle in comics that are geared towards the reader that may have grown up reading Archie and want to continue to do so but wants something more contemporary. Examples of that would be the *Archie Meets KISS* series or the *Archie Meets Glee series*."

As to working with characters that are not your own, Goldwater told me "We respect each property as if it's our own. We treat each individual character, each story, the art, everything that goes into making

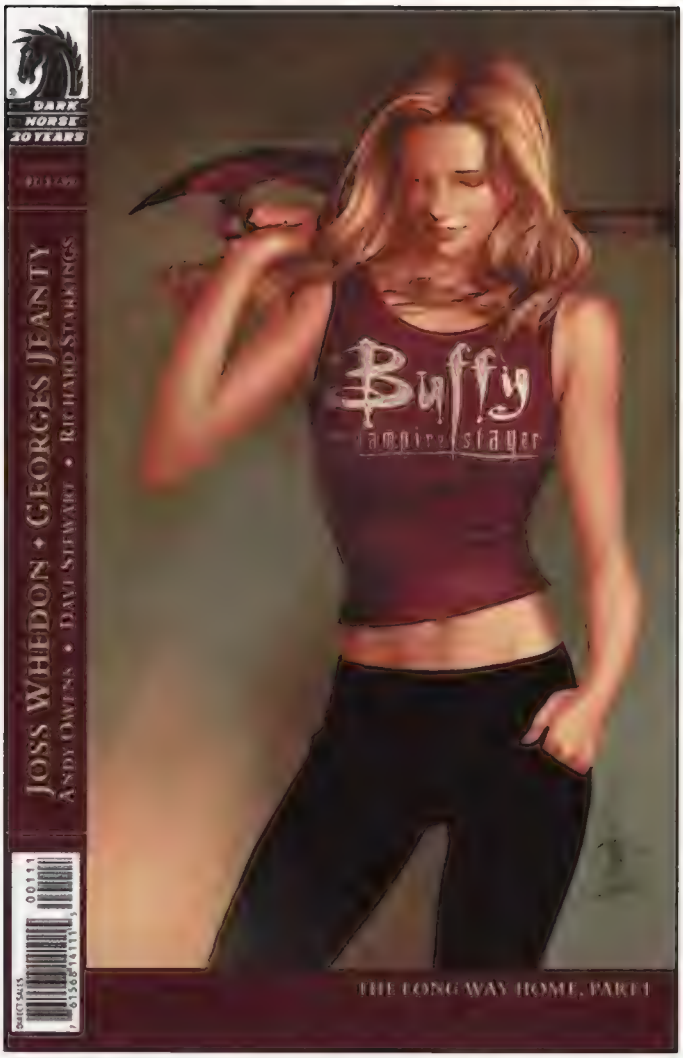


the comic, with the utmost respect. There truly is no difference."

Jeremy Dale, writer on all ages comics *Skyward* and *Princeless* for Action Lab told me "I'm finding less a dilemma in finding fans of a variety of age groups. I just wrapped up a *Skyward* signing tour of well over a dozen comic shops all over the US, and from what I've seen, I believe they are reading comics, and are excited about the idea. A quick Tumblr search for comics-related talk reveals a plethora of excited readers getting excited about comics as well. Are they hanging out in comic shops? Somewhat, but I'm finding they're using services like ComiXology and torrenting a lot more often."

Using the digital comics distributor ComiXology means money goes to the creators and publishers of the comics. Torrenting, however, does not. And is rather illegal to boot. Jeremy continued, and highlighted the very reason licensed comics exist.

"One problem, however, is finding a property they want to read. Once they move past the initial rush of the mainstream superhero characters, what are we doing to hook them long-term? To make matters worse, most "all-ages" books are placed in the comics ghetto of the dusty "for kids" area of comic shops-- an area well stocked with good books, but since most of those books are the latest licensed cartoon property aimed at small children... it's taken less seriously and ignored. Even great, great shops are known to do this-- and maybe for the "first time stepping into a comic shop" parent, it's useful. The kids usually run over to the new releases and ignore those kiddie


DARK HORSE 20 YEARS
JOSS WHEDON • GEORGES JEANTY
ANDY OWENS • DAVE STEWART • RICHARD STARKINGS
Buffy
vampire slayer
THE LONG WAY HOME, PART 1

sections, I've found."

"Stocking those all-ages books in both areas might be a solution--it's hard to say, as each comic shop has its own design that seemingly works for them and their clientele."

"At the end of the day, all we need is a legitimate effort from the publishers, the distributors, and the retailers into putting our books in front of the reader. From there, it's all on us."

But where does it all go wrong? Jeremy said,"The biggest challenge has been the last few decades of precedent that have been set. There was a time when the type of books that we're making were normal fare. There was a time you could hand your ten year old *Batman* and not worry about it. But since that time comics have changed a lot and the audience that might come looking for all ages books are often not looking in the comic book shops. Thanks to the nature of a lot of the news stories that larger media outlets have done about comics, all some folks know is that they're 'not for kids anymore.' I've talked to a number of 40 year old men that have read my comic. Some of them even liked it. Some of them read it to their kids afterword. But the average parent looking to buy their kid a book, even a comic, just isn't looking in the comic store anymore."

And that's probably the nub of this article. The all ages comic, licensed or otherwise, is at risk of being divorced from an audience that might most appreciate it. Jamal Igle, creator of the *Molly Danger* books told me,"I suppose the biggest challenge is visibility. We're creating whole world out of new cloth. For a lot of fans in the mainstream, that's a no go. The unfamiliar

bothers them, it upsets the "natural order" because *Molly Danger* isn't spun out from a Marvel or DC book. Even if she had some sort of connective creative tissue I think it would still be an uphill climb. Even larger companies have a hard time introducing new concepts. Not only are you fighting against the preconceived notion of what an all ages book is supposed to be, you're fighting the lifelong comics fan for a little bit of their time and money."

"It's a world that has been dominated and cultivated by a deep loyalty to a particular company, and we all know people who are strictly a fan of one company or another. Younger readers aren't in the comic shops, they're in bookstores and online, but in order to gain traction in most comic shops, that's where you need to go. I don't have a problem with adults reading *Molly*, because I wrote it in a way that I hoped would appeal to everyone. I do hope to expand Molly's reach as we go forward."

But one place publishers have found to launch all ages comics for kids, licensed and otherwise, is that wonderful creation, Free Comic Book Day. The first Saturday in May sees major comic book publishers selling aspecific comic to comic stores to be given away for free.

It's become a focal point for a number of customer groups, but the biggest push is always for all ages kids comics, some licensed, some not, and pushed at recruiting a new generation. The Archaia *Mouse Guard* hardcover was the most impressive, but *Archie, The Simpsons, Avatar The Last Airbender, Adventure Time* and many more are stalwarts for this event now – and certainly when I take my girls to Free Comic Book Day, they treat it as a sampling exercise. They are now committed *My Little Pony* readers. Some stores see the usual faces, but others use it as an opportunity to evangelise about all ages comics, with libraries, schools, and cinemas being drawn into the promotion.

And with *Transformers* comics now being given away free with toys, with IDW's Micro-Packs extending into *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and with digitally licensed comics being sold alongside the game that they are licensed from, could the gap between product and licensed comic finally be growing smaller? And can other all ages comics take inspiration to connect closer with a younger audience again?

Here's hoping. Tomorrow's comics readers have to come from somewhere.

L'il Crossed anyone?

ARMOR HUNTERS

A LANDMARK 18-PART CROSSOVER EVENT

JUNE

- [ ] ARMOR HUNTERS #1
- [ ] UNITY #8
- [ ] X-O MANOWAR #26

JULY

- [ ] ARMOR HUNTERS #2
- [ ] ARMOR HUNTERS: BLOODSHOT #1
- [ ] ARMOR HUNTERS: HARBINGER #1
- [ ] UNITY #9
- [ ] X-O MANOWAR #27

AUGUST

- [ ] ARMOR HUNTERS #3
- [ ] ARMOR HUNTERS: BLOODSHOT #2
- [ ] ARMOR HUNTERS: HARBINGER #2
- [ ] UNITY #10
- [ ] X-O MANOWAR #28

SEPTEMBER

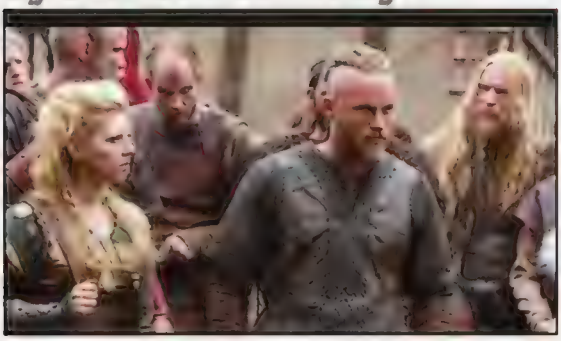
- [ ] ARMOR HUNTERS: BLOODSHOT #3
- [ ] ARMOR HUNTERS: HARBINGER #3
- [ ] UNITY #11
- [ ] X-O MANOWAR #29
- [ ] ARMOR HUNTERS #4

VALIANT FIRST

THIS SUMMER... **EARTH** WILL BE THE **GREATEST** HUNT OF **ALL**

BETWEEN MYTH AND HISTORY: WHEN BLEEDING COOL VISITED THE VIKINGS

By Brendon Connelly



From certain angles, the illusion appeared complete. It seemed for all the world that I was looking out through a Viking settlement and over to the water where a longship was floating menacingly in the mist. From other angles, the trickery was obvious. The longship was shorter than it first appeared, and the stalls and buildings seemed to hide the trappings of modern filmmaking behind every corner.

Of course, it was all designed for "certain angles," with everything built in service of the camera, every detail meant to create a perfectly imperfect, precisely controlled window onto an ancient world. As I danced back and forth from in front of to behind the curtain I was seeing it all, the dream solidifying, turning wispy, then solidifying again. But as the rain started to fall, I realised one good reason that these weren't just your typical back lot flats. The sets for *Vikings* were built in Dublin, one of the most dependably wet corners of the known Universe. They were built for wear, tear, and for getting roughed up. They were built to bed in, grow over, to stand like the actual thing would have to. Their dark corners might be full of camera kit and lighting rigs instead of grain and straw and hanging carcasses, but these Viking buildings were built for real.

I took a quick look at the weeds

and tramped-in mud to appreciate how beautifully messy everything was and then ran for cover leaving Ireland's weather to do its worst. The "built for real" approach exemplifies a desire for authenticity that runs pretty deep into this particular show. I wanted to know more about this, so hiding from the downpour but still nowhere near happy to take my jacket off, I sat down for a chat with Michael Hirst, the show's creator.

Hirst explained that he wants the show to keep its roots in historical accuracy but, at the same time; he did have to admit that everything we think we know about the Vikings is based more on conjecture and, at best, second hand reporting than would be ideal."It was the dark ages and the Vikings never wrote anything down themselves. What was written about them at the time was written by hostile witnesses. There are definite limits to what we know."

What's more, Hirst has readily brought in imagery and even characters from Norse mythology to mix with the historical figures. But this too, he told me, is in the service of a truth - if a truth seen only from the perspective of the Vikings he's portraying. "If I were writing about the story of Jesus Christ and show him in the cave after the crucifixion, coming back to life, is that fantasy? Because if it's fantasy, then the whole Christian religion has no basis at all. To Christians, it's not fantasy, it's fact. And for me, the same thing goes for seeing Odin on the battlefield if you're a Viking. This was not fantasy to them, it was the real thing."

The lead character of the show, as beefily embodied by Australian actor Travis Fimmel, his dried-in sweat and ground-in grit, is Ragnar Lothbrok, one of history's Viking rulers to have been immortalised in legend. Hirst explained how he marshalled what historical accounts there are when conceiving of Lothbrok as his hero."We don't know huge amounts about Ragnar, but we know enough for me to thread a narrative around him. He believed that he had descended from the god Odin, who was not only the god of slain warriors but also the god of curiosity. So I thought, 'I've got

this great character here, and I'll make him as curious as Odin.' So the reason he'll go west is not principally for plunder. Ragnar is not motivated by rape and plunder and all of those nasty things we associate with the Vikings, he's interested in exploring other places, other lands."

Ragnar's chief antagonist on the show, if I can reduce their more complex relationship that much, is his brother Rollo, played by the brilliantly booming, luxuriously bearded Clive Standen. He gave me a good example of how the crew's dedication to specific, authentic sets and props helps the actors. "You turn up to work and it's almost like there's no acting required. It's all there for you. You ask for a prop and there you go - a living, working Viking board game."

What's more, when it came to getting the battle scenes right, the "living, working" weapons themselves set the agenda. Stunt co-ordinator Frank Henson explained that the tool implies the task. "The weapon you're using basically generates what you can do with it. But we did look at Viking films made before now and at Viking history and there's a few re-enactors out there who insist they know what the Vikings did so we used a little of that."

They weren't filming any battle action during my time on set, unfortunately, and one scene with Katheryn Winnick as Lagertha taking a bath was closed to the press for obvious reasons. The afternoon did see Fimmel come to set, however, for a rather unusual bit of business with John Kavanagh as The Seer and a real, live – or perhaps I should say "living, working" – snake. In take after take, Fimmel wielded the snake, winding it in the air and... licking it. This was not something in the script but an invention of the actor's. Between set ups, Fimmel put the beast down and came over to the video village to field press questions. He's obviously quite a fearless actor, if also a very modest one, and one at home in the Viking world.

"I'd love to live in this period. I'd love no phones, and you've still got to survive. And no MTV and all that stuff. "But Fimmel's

career is skyrocketing and while they've got him locked down for *Vikings* series one and two at least, and they're certainly very lucky to have him, Duncan Jones' *Warcraft* movie is bound to dial up his Hollywood career by a notch or three.

Hirst admits that, sooner or later, they're going to lose their leading man. "We will lose Ragnar at some stage but to be truthful, I don't know exactly when that is. In the third season we'll have the attack on Paris, so that's a huge build up for us and during the second season Ragnar has four more sons, so we have to watch them grow up a little bit. We can move forward in time at certain points, but I want the audience to be as embedded with the boys as they are with Ragnar. In my mind it's the saga of Ragnar, so it's a family saga."

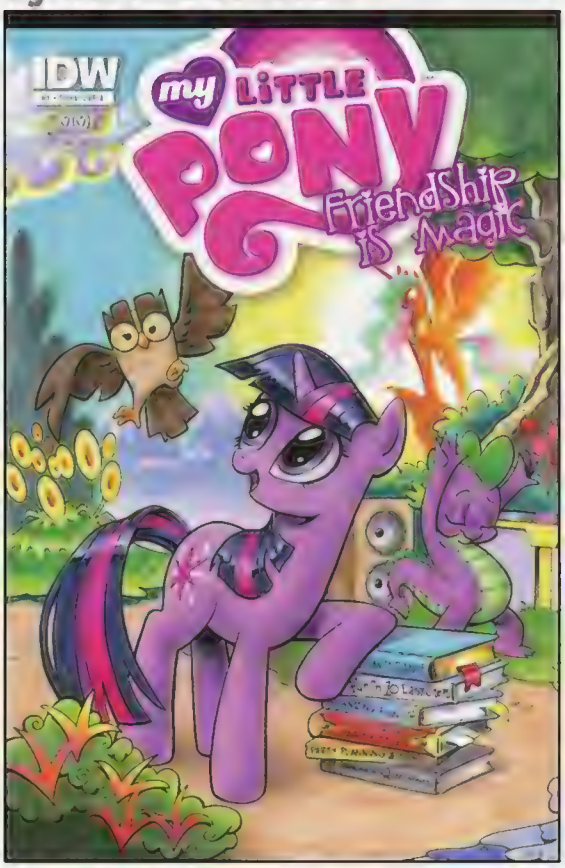
Fimmel says that he's not even sure himself when he'll be leaving, implying that it might not even be his decision when. "Yeah, I'm getting killed as some stage. Whenever is true to history, I guess. You read every script as if you're waiting for somebody to die. It could be you."

I think that he's being clouded by modesty there. The chances of Hirst and the producers giving up Fimmel before they need to are very slim indeed. It's really not every day that a TV series gets a leading man as effortlessly charismatic as this one.

Season one of *Vikings* is now available on DVD and Blu-ray. The second series will air on The History Channel in the US this Spring.

KID-FRIENDLY AND IDW APPROVED!

by Keith Davidsen

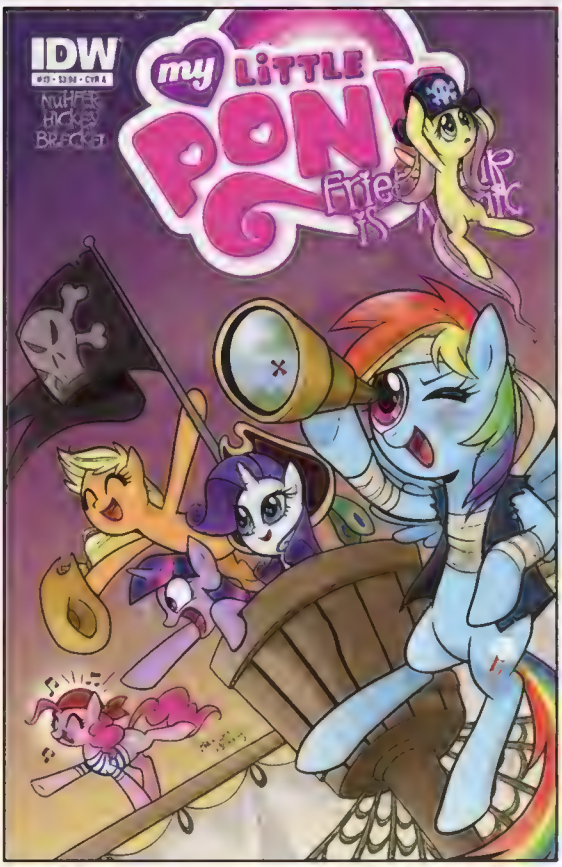


IDW Publishing has come a long way in its past fifteen years, expanding its line from its most notable early success – the vampire phenomenon *30 Days of Night* – into a vast publishing line that spans every genre and age demographic. In particular, they've made significant strides in acquiring licenses and developing new content suited for children.

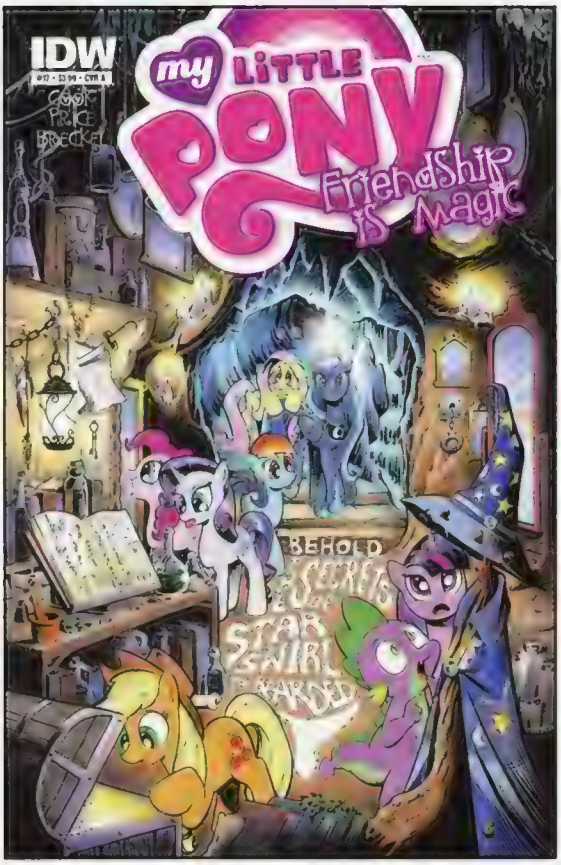
It's kind of amazing – in an entertainment marketplace dominated by the corporations behind The Mouse and The Bunny, IDW has arguably carved out the All Ages comic book market for itself. They've got *Powerpuff Girls* and *Ben 10*, *Dexter's Laboratory* and *Rocky & Bullwinkle*, *Ghostbusters* and *Mr. Peabody & Sherman*, *Dorothy of Oz* and *Popeye*, *Battle Beasts* and *Transformers*. For those grown-up comic fans that worry the next generation won't appreciate the four-color funnies, IDW has an entire library ready to allay their fears!

We've reached out to the creative and editorial teams behind *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: New Animated Adventures*, *Samurai Jack*, and the runaway blockbuster *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* to find out what makes IDW's latest projects so darn appealing to kids and adults alike.

MY LITTLE PONY: MAGIC MAKES IT ALL COMPLETE



When you reach out to the creators of IDW's kid-friendly comics, you realize that – for many – the passion for these projects transcends the generations, as writer/artist Katie Cook of *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* can attest. "I am an Eighties kid, so I was there for *My Little Pony* with the first generation of toys and cartoons. I fell off the wagon with Generations Two and Three, but I loved the new show before IDW asked me to work on the comic."

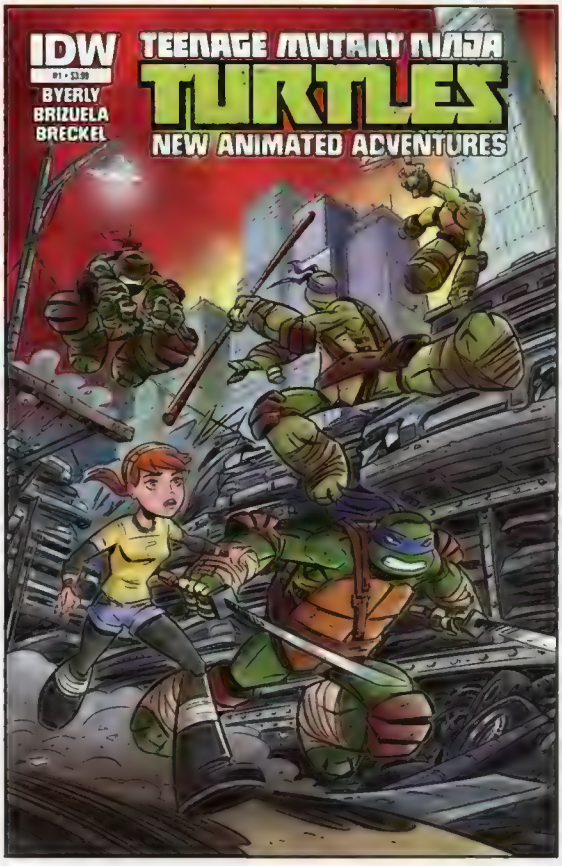


"We have two unique fan bases – children and adults – and both take away different things," says artist Andy Price. "Katie and I both think about the kids first, and fans are a very close second. Our goal with kids is that they continue to read comics, and take away fun from our stories. With the adult fan base, they enjoy that we strive for accuracy with character depiction and show continuity. To that end, Hasbro works with us a great deal."

For an adult reading an issue of *My Little Pony*, it's a wild romp – fast-paced and colorful, with lots of silliness and the occasional in-joke that only a grown-up can appreciate (for example, in the first issue, there's a situationally appropriate reference to Donald Sutherland's final scene in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*). But with all the frenetic activity and lively interaction on the page keeping an adult well-occupied, one can only imagine how entertaining the book would be to a child!

Editor Bobby Curnow shares that – while the comic does feature the traditional conflict of Good against Evil that we're familiar with in the comics medium, there's something deeper at work within *My Little Pony*. "We have both slice-of-life adventures (especially in the *Friends Forever* line) and stories that feature villains. The power and meaning of friendship is a core theme that runs throughout the books,though, regardless of what sort of villain might be appearing in the story." So at the core, it's frolicking fun with strong values. No wonder the Bronies watch it faithfully with their kids!

NINJA TURTLES: STILL HEROES IN A HALF-SHELL

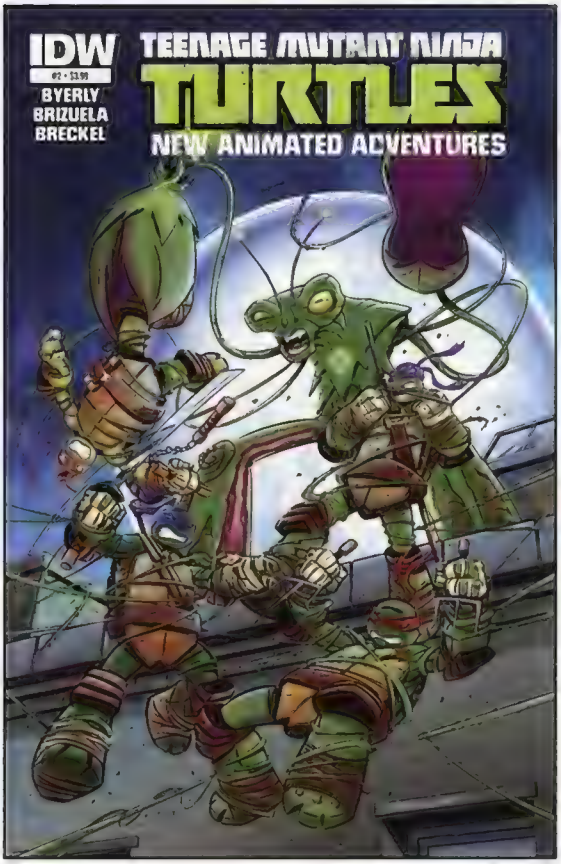


The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles have had a long lifespan. Unlike some retro 1980s properties, the Turtles have existed in one form or another throughout the years, maintaining an appeal to fans both young

and old. For this reason, IDW skews a little older with its core TMNT titles, while simultaneously publishing the *New Animated Adventures* series based on the current television show.

"A lot of people expect Nickelodeon's *Ninja Turtles* to be very silly and goofy, but what I like about it is how it makes the characters funny without selling out the reality of the world or the seriousness of the threats," says writer Kenny Byerly. "The comedy comes from the characters' distinctive personalities and their interactions with each other, not from making a joke out of the adventure. When I was working on the show we always described the tone as a sitcom in their lair, and *Die Hard* when they're on a mission. I think it's a great balance and a big reason why the show works for older fans as well as young kids."

Flipping through the pages of *New Animated Adventures* feels nostalgic in the way that your first comic twenty or forty years ago would've felt (or whenever, depending on your age). It's safe, but not watered-down in the least. These cartoon-inspired stories feel fresh and exciting, often epic in scope and easy to jump on-board (even if you're not used to seeing April O'Neil as a teenager, or otherwise suffering tunnel vision due to that zesty Megan Fox's upcoming movie role).



Speaking of the scope, Byerly adds, "I love writing fights and action set pieces, and one of my favorite things about writing *Turtles* is trying to come up with bigger and crazier things to do. In a kids' comic, obviously no one is going to go on a killing spree. But within those bounds, they should be as threatening as possible, ideally with some hints of deeper menace that older readers can pick up on and read things into, even if younger readers won't." While the creative team at IDW holds to their responsibility to kid-friendly content on this particular comic series, the writer adds, "The TV show

has actually gone to some surprisingly dark places of late, and it would be fun if the comic could play in that space sometimes, too."

SAMURAI JACK: THE TIME-DISPLACED WARRIOR JUMPS TO 2014

A groundbreaking program that aired on Cartoon Network from 2001 through 2004, *Samurai Jack* may not have had the multiple reboots and massive merchandising appeal of the two previous titles showcased in this article, but writer Jim Zub succinctly pointed out the amazing appeal of this particular project. "When I first saw it back in 2001, I was amazed at how Genndy Tartakovsky and his crew were able to create something contemporary that felt absolutely timeless at the same time. That mixture of classic story concepts and genres with a bold graphic approach to the art and emphasis on mood was a real breath of fresh air."

Samurai Jack is such a beautifully simple concept: a noble and mysterious loner must challenge and defeat a clearly evil force – the shape-shifting demon Aku. It's the *Man With No Name*-model that's intrinsically part of human culture. Along the way, he may find other causes to stand behind, but each is addressed in a quick, episodic way. Easy in, easy out... with reader happiness all throughout. "Each issue is built to stand on its own, much like the show did, but we do have larger/longer plot lines developing, as well. Our first five issues are called 'The Threads of Time' and introduce a new possible way for Jack to get back to the past, but each chapter is its own self-contained quest as part of that larger mission, so it's easy for new readers to jump on board at any point."

Artist Andy Suriano brings a little something special to the comic book: "I was an employee of Jack! I worked on all four seasons of the TV show as a character

designer at Cartoon Network." To that end, he is perhaps the best person suited to translating the cartoon to the printed page. "Personally, I try to bring movement and energy through each panel, as if you're watching animated pictures. I hope *Samurai Jack* fans will feel like it's not only a continuation of the television series, but incorporate it into their lives as a new and personal experience with the character."

Editor Carlos Guzman echoed the sentiment of the longtime *Samurai Jack* artist: "I hope fans will see the comic series not as a simple tie-in, but as a genuine attempt by everyone involved on the book to bring the dynamic action and impactful storytelling of the TV show to the comic page. We're very focused on appealing to younger and older fans alike. Anyone, from people who watched the TV show when it aired to younger kids looking for action-packed adventure, will enjoy the comic!"

THE IDW SHOUT-OUT: HEY KIDS, COMICS!

If you're reading Bleeding Cool, then you're probably well-versed in the politics and economics of the comic book industry. You know that publishers seek out the hottest licenses because they want to turn a profit. Everyone – from the toy manufacturers to the publishers, the distributor to the retailer – everyone wants a desirable product to sell.

But when you walk into your friendly neighborhood shop and see a wide-eyed kid gawking at the colorful racks, when you celebrate Free Comic Book Day alongside a crowd of cheering boys and girls, when you see children lining up at a convention booth for an artist's sketch, you know that there's still something wondrous and magical about comics. And – in an age when social media draws people together and conventions seemingly spring into existence everywhere – it's easier than ever for creators to behold the fruits of their labor.

"I have fan art, e-mails, and more that I keep from little girls that love the comic, little boys who love the comic, and parents who tell me that their kids now want to read more comics after having read *My Little Pony*," says Katie Cook. "It warms my heart to be giving something to the next generation of comic readers... especially girls."

"The kids are absolutely incredible," adds Andy Price. "At every appearance, I've had kids come to me with their own drawings. So many parents have been grateful that they can take their kids to the comic shop, and this is an incredible thing to hear, particularly in a time when extremely few comics are kid-friendly. A number of parents have said that they use the comic to help their kids learn to read; how much more wonderful a thing can one hear, that a parent is using something you worked on to teach their kids? It's incredibly humbling."

Both of these *My Little Pony* creators were happy to share particular anecdotes

from their convention-going experiences, stories that would warm the hearts of even the most cynical comic readers. For starters, Price shared, "I had a little girl come up to my table at a convention with *My Little Pony #1*. While some people come up to me with CGC-graded copies, this one was ripped, smeared, and taped, with its cover hanging on for dear life. It was loved. Her mother said she slept with the book."

He continued, "At New York Comic-Con, a very large name in the comics industry stopped at my table with his little girl. You could tell that she was ready to go home. While I talked with her parents, she slowly realized what she was looking at – seeing the Pony art on my table – and she slowly lit up, smiling more and more at each page. Yes, she gets to see comics all the time, but this was something bright and happy, and she immediately was taken with it!"

Cook, on the other hand, delighted at the feistiness of one particular fan. "My favorite moment with a young reader was at Denver Comic Con last year. I asked a little girl who her least favorite pony was. She basically spat out 'Fluttershy!' This is not the normal response from a little girl! So when I asked her why, she rolled her eyes and said, 'Because yellow and pink look so bad together.' I loved her."

The *My Little Pony* crew isn't alone in making connections to today's youthful comic readers. Jim Zub of *Samurai Jack* also got into the action: "At a convention I exhibited at late last year, I drew a picture of Jack for a young boy and his eyes bugged out. He couldn't believe that I drew it right in front of him and he walked away holding that sketch like it was made of gold. That was unbelievably gratifying. It's the kind of stuff that makes all the work worthwhile."

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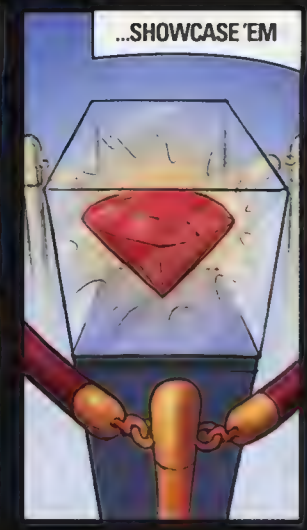

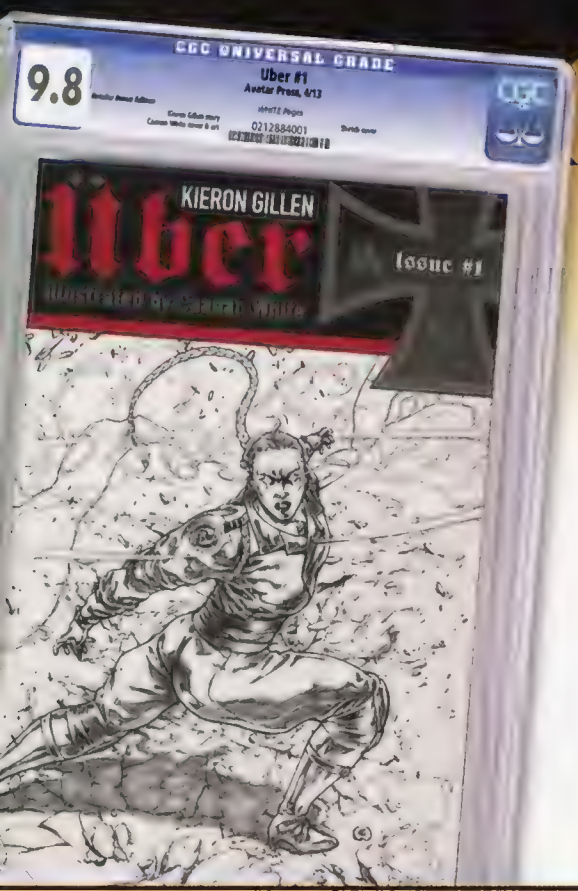

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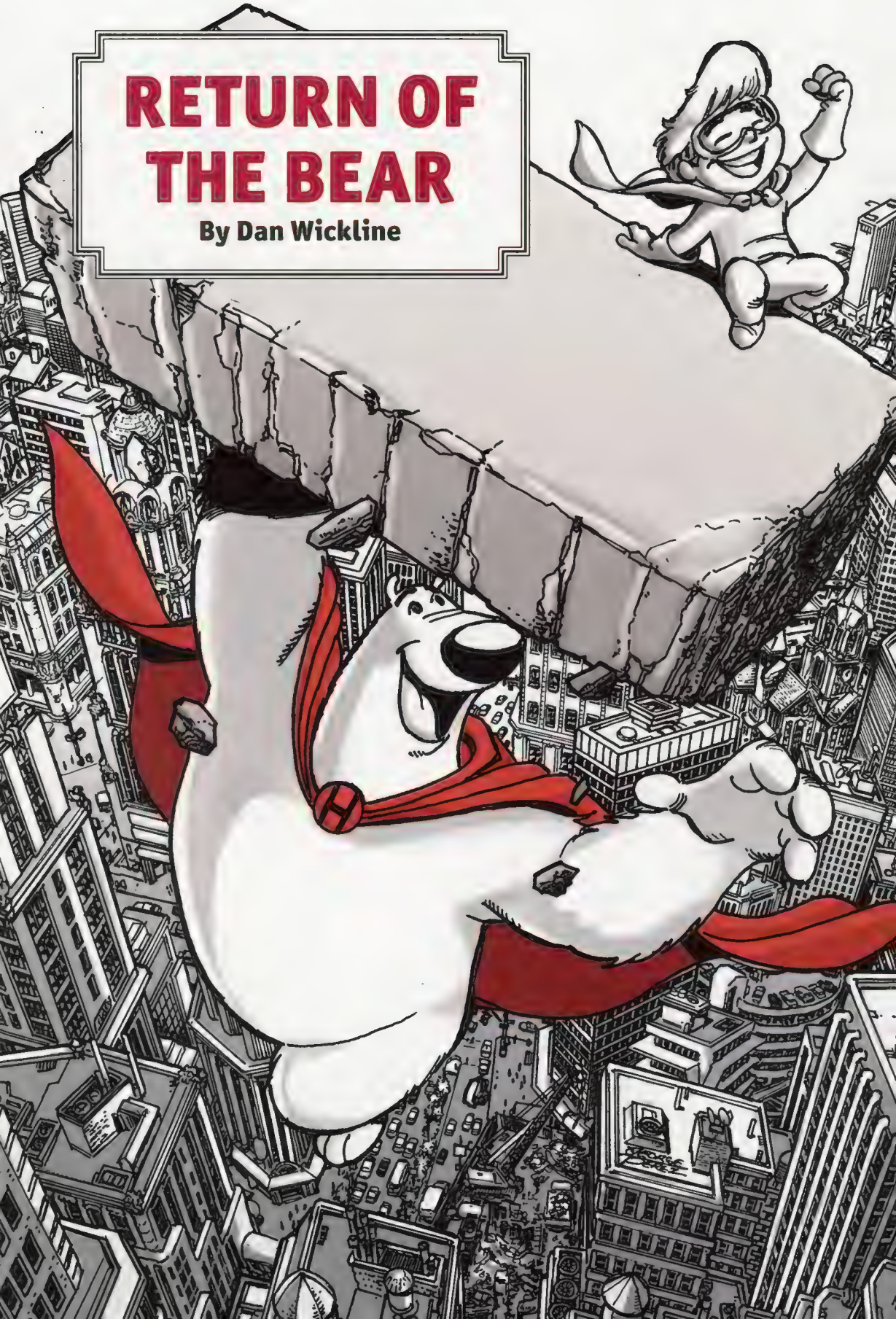

RETURN OF
THE BEAR
By Dan Wickline

RETURN OF THE BEAR
By Dan Wickline

Mike Kunkel has made a name for himself as an all-ages creator, first with his hit creator-owned series *Herobear And The Kid* and then on *Billy Batson And The Magic Of Shazam!* Being a cartoonist was Kunkel's childhood dream from back when he put a desk and bulletin board in his closet and put up a sign saying "Cartoon Company."

His company, the Astonish Factory has a motto: Remember your childhood... and pass it on. Kunkel has been doing just that and now he returns to where it began... no he's not drawing in his closet again, he's taken his tale of Tyler and the old stuffed bear he inherited from his grandfather over to Boom! Studios.

EXCEPT FOR THE HALLOWEEN ONE-SHOT, YOU'VE BEEN AWAY FROM *HEROBEAR AND THE KID* FOR YEARS. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE NOW WAS THE TIME TO COME BACK TO THE SERIES?

The simple answer is that it makes me happy to create these stories, and the right conditions came together to create more. The longer answer is that it's something I've wanted to do for a while now, and it just seems like the right time and right place. Boom! has just felt like the best home to begin sharing Herobear again now... really awesome people there and they really understand what I want to do with the characters and their stories. And, getting the chance to do last year's FCBD short story, an added story to the originals and two original one-shot specials... well, I've thoroughly enjoyed relaunching Herobear and Tyler and the response has been humbling and wonderful.

THE STORY FOR THE NEW SERIES IS ABOUT TYLER AND HEROBEAR SEARCHING FOR THEIR MISSING BUTLER HENRY. WHAT DO YOU SEE AS HENRY'S ROLE IN THE SERIES AND HOW DOES HIS ABSENCE CHANGE THE DYNAMIC IN THE STORY?

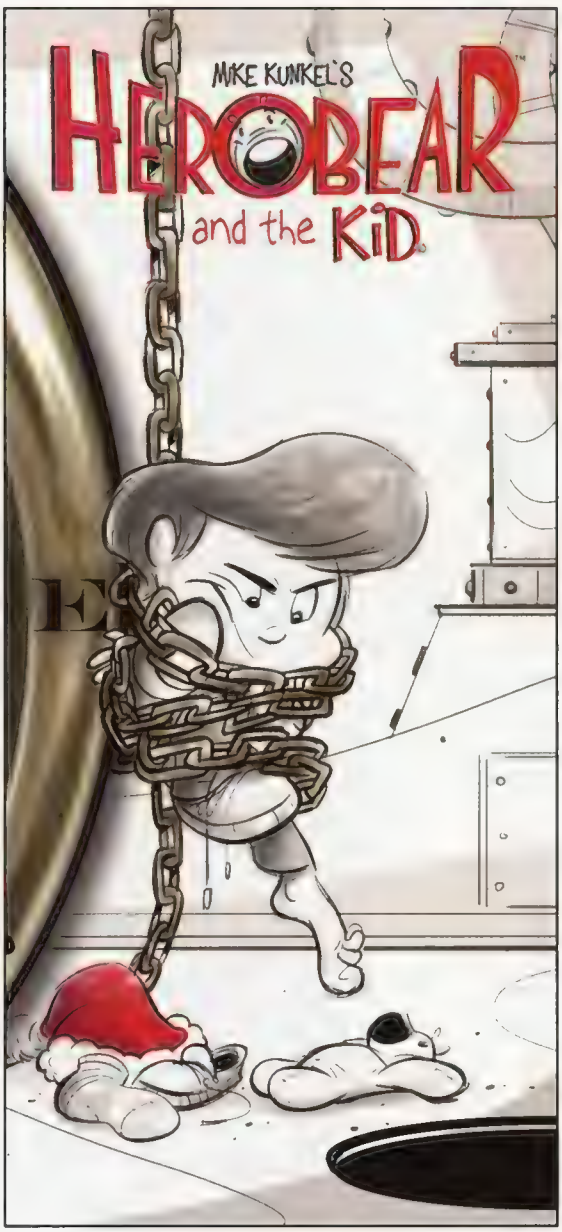
Henry is very important to Tyler's family. He is and has always been the "Alfred" to Tyler and Herobear. He has watched over Tyler's family for a long time now. But there comes a time, when Henry needs watching over, and that time is now. And Tyler now has to step up with Herobear and fulfill more of his destiny and in the process, he will learn a lot about his heritage.

What is an "in-between book" and where did the idea of doing it come from?

An "in-between book" is something I've wanted to do for a long time. It's the opportunity to tell a story that is "in-between" two moments in a bigger story. And this one is an especially important moment that I've wanted to tell. In the first story arc, there's a moment before Tyler gets to his Grandfather's house and meets Henry... the in-between story tells a tale of Henry's past and the main villain Von Klon, and their connection. This is now very important for the new "Saving Time" mini-series that's coming this year. I couldn't be happier to have finished that story and now have it in the new TPB coming out. Plus, since my background is animation, it's like an "in-between" drawing between the main poses of a scene of animation, so I had to borrow the term from there.

You published the first series through your own company but now you are going through Boom! Studios. What made you decide to take it to another publisher and why did you choose Boom!?

My Astonish Factory is still doing my other books... my Children's picture books like "Timmy and the Moon Piece," and my other stories, but I felt like it was time to build a relationship with a partner in producing and publishing my work. Boom! really felt like the right home for Herobear. Boom! has a great support and belief in the creators and the stories being told through them. Ross, Matt, Filip, Bryce... everyone there truly believes in, and cares about, all the projects there and the creators attached. And as I looked at their all-ages stable of books, I honestly could feel my 10 year-old self calling out to me... to now see *Herobear and the Kid* on a table next to *Peanuts* and *Garfield* is so awesome! I love the presentation of all-ages books that Boom! has. And the great thing about them is that they do it because they love it, not because they have to do all-ages books. You can tell it's because they truly love them. And I'm honored to be part of a studio that puts out these books.



You are doing what everyone is comics is saying needs to be done, making comics for younger readers, but very few creators actually do it. And you are winning awards while doing it. What made you decide to write a book for all-ages and why do you think you are so good at it?

Well, first, I'm honored that the response to what I've chosen to create has had a welcoming audience for it. I truly am overwhelmed by the support and love. I set out to create stories that I wanted to read and read with my kids. I want people to find my stories as something they can enjoy and enjoy sharing. I've always said that I love the "shared event" that all-ages books create. It's what I hope that mine do for the audience. Parents sharing with kids, aunts and uncles sharing with nieces and nephews, grandparents sharing with grandkids, teachers sharing with students... all-ages books are truly that... for all-ages. The kids and the kids at heart.

What are your plans for after this series? Will we see more of *Herobear And The Kid*? What's next for Mike Kunkel?

Well, this series is a big one for me. With my regular day job and life commitments, I'm going to thoroughly enjoy creating this new story. There's a lot to it and I want it to be right. But most definitely, there will be more *Herobear and the Kid*. I've got some new comic strip versions of the characters I've been working on, and also some more one-shot adventures. Along with that, I just finished my 2nd successful Kickstarter project. It's called the *Squiggle Project* and it's a brand new art book that I've been working on that's coming out this Summer.

Finally, and most of all, if I can babble for one more moment... I'm overwhelmed by the great response to putting out more *Herobear* and my other story books lately. I want to take this last little moment to thank all the fans for being very, very awesome. Thank you all.

HEY PARENTS, COMICS!

By James Kuhoric

There is no better experience than being able to share something you enjoy with your children. Reading comic books together is a fantastic way to bond with your kids and to introduce them to a medium that has been expanding imaginations since its inception. But like virtually every other medium in today's connected world, you have to be careful about what comics you decide to read together when it comes to young children. Most Marvel and DC Gold and Silver Age comics are about as wholesome as it gets. Usually the adventures were geared toward kids as the main audience and are at their worst PG rated by today's standards. But with the Bronze and Modern Ages came darker and more mature content. Comics were growing up and have continued to do so in the 21st Century alongside television, movies, video games, and web content.

Today's children are exposed to violence, sexuality, and political agendas at a very young age. Comics are the same way and have the identical variety of content as the hundreds of television channels that kids watch every day. While comics in general have the stigma of being generally made for kids, you now have to be aware of content before letting young children have their run of the swath of comics being published each week. Even the mainstays like *Batman* and *Spider-Man* are generally more mature than the uninitiated may assume and require some knowledge to adequately gauge content for young kids.

Even though comics went through a dark and gritty growing up phase, the last five years have really ushered in a new "golden age" of all-ages fare. Titles like *Regular show, Powerpuff Girls, Adventure Time, My Little Pony,* and *Spongebob* have created new opportunities for young boys and girls to experience the joy of comics for the first time. And they have given parents a wide range of suitable content to enjoy with their kids. This article attempts to give you a few target titles which comic reading parents can use to read with their young children and to enjoy as we welcome new generations to the hobby.

My Little Pony & *Herobear and the Kid*

RECOMMENDED AGE 5+

For years comics were seen as entertainment for boys that focused on super powered beings bashing each other into oblivion. Thankfully some comics publishers finally realized there is a whole other audience out there wanting to be entertained and enjoy the medium. And we have seen content shift toward introducing girls to comics at an early age. Titles like *My Little Pony* are a wonderful way to enjoy colorful comics with young children of both genders. The magical talking horses tackle all sorts of trouble and always do so with swirl of color and joy. Likewise, Mike Kunkle's animation inspired *Herobear and the Kid* is a perfect title to capture the hearts of all children by presenting the flights of fancy that play across the imagination of the young. Beautifully illustrated and telling stories of a boy and his best friend Herobear, this series captures the magic of childhood and delivers it to readers with undeniable delight. For the young and the young at heart, both series are perfect to introduce families to comics.

Scribblenauts Unmasked & *Teen Titans Go!*

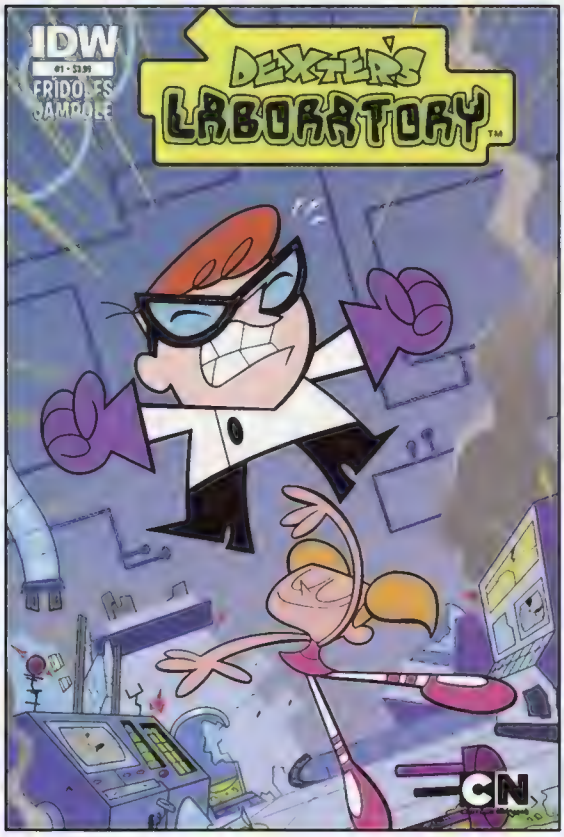
RECOMMENDED AGE 5+

DC really seems to understand how to mesmerize audiences young and old with their fantastic all ages fare. *Teen Titans Go!* is a raucous comedic adventure that uses the DC Universe as a gateway to some of the funniest antics in comics today. And the Nintendo DS inspired *Scribblenaut Unmasked* is the all ages comic equivalent of *Injustice*. Both are family friendly and specifically female friendly so as to open up a welcoming door to the DC universe to young girls. These series provide a welcome image of female superheroes that is accessible and positive. Even characters like Starfire that are normally overly sexualized in many standard comics are presented in a manner that invites new readers to enjoy the team's antics. The DC universe is full of great comics and these two are the perfect introduction to one of the cornerstone publishers of the industry.

Dexters Laboratory & Powerpuff Girls

RECOMMENDED AGE 7+

Are there two more widely recognized classic Cartoon Network series than these? Both ran in the late 90s and early 2000s making it quite possible that adolescents watching the shows in their original run are now parents themselves. And nothing creates a better bond between children and parents than being able to share something that is special to both. Dexter's antics are timeless as he attempts to thwart his nemesis and keep his meddling sister DeeDee out of his secret lab. While the Powerpuff girls redefine sugar and spice and everything nice with some help from Chemical X. The girls become superheroes fighting off a rogue's gallery of villains including the evil and unforgettable Mojo Jojo. These two series entertain children and adults with a mix of innovative, funny, mischief that will have everyone laughing from start to finish.



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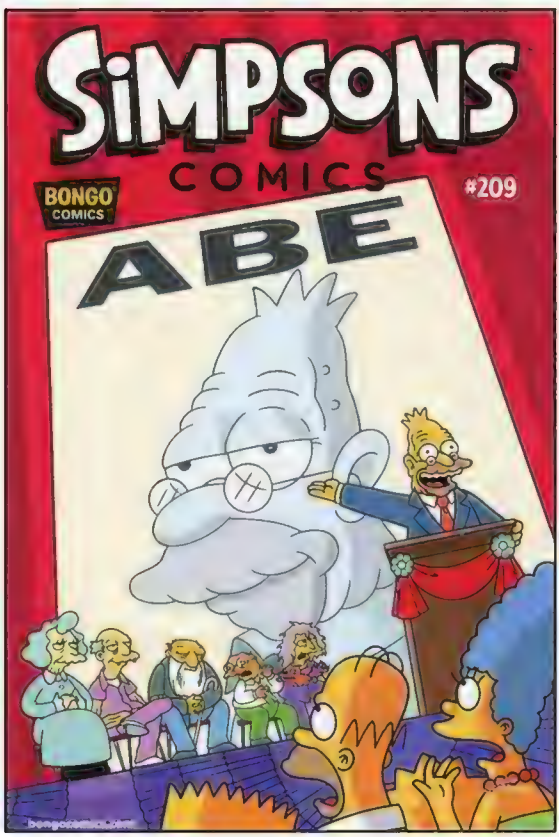
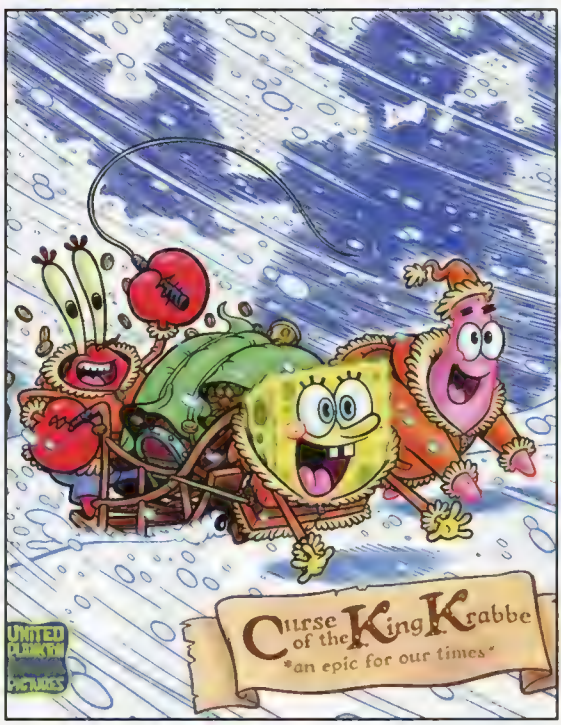
DUH. HOW ELSE COULD YOU KISS THEM?



Spongebob & Simpsons

RECOMMENDED AGE 7+ (*Spongebob*)
RECOMMENDED AGE 11+ (*Simpsons*)

The Simpsons and *Spongebob Squarepants* are two of the longest running animated shows of all time. These classic cartoons have been entertaining people for generations and as such have an extensive fan following of literally all ages. Whether you enjoy eternal bad boy Bart Simpson's antics or Krabby Patty obsessed Spongebob's capers, both series have something to offer the comics fan. *Spongebob* is generally aimed at younger audiences with its trademark over-the-top silliness and colorful characters. *The Simpsons* is a title that skews slightly older with snarky remarks and commentary that will amuse the teen and adult alongside younger audiences. *Spongebob* generally appeal tokids in grades 2-5 with *The Simpsons* aiming at 5-8 (and up). Some of the topics in *The Simpsons* skew a little mature but usuallyis over the heads of the younger audience or just implied so more sophisticated readers understand the jokes.



Archie Comics

RECOMMENDED AGE 7+ *(Specific Sensitive Topic Issues at Parent's Discretion)*

Archie Comics is an institution in family friendly reading. Since the early days of the medium, the Riverdale gang has been laughing, crying, and experiencing teenage life alongside popular culture. New friends are added to the cast and more and more, Archie and pals find themselves facing some of the most contemporary topics and problems of the world. While the core titles focuses on the fun we've seen out of the gang for decades, Archie Comics finds a way to introduce everything from the damage bullying causes to the pain of prejudice in the pages of their books. Kevin Keller helps to spread acceptance as something everyone deserves and his adventures broach difficult topics that young people need to understand. Whether Archie is fighting off the zombie hordes in the critically acclaimed *Afterlife with Archie* or getting a soda pop at the mall in *Betty and Veronica*, now more than ever there really is something for everyone in their line of comics.

Adventure Time & *Regular Show*

RECOMMENDED AGE 9+

The folks at BOOM! Studios seem to really have their fingers on the pulse of modern kids' comics. They've taken two of the most original new animated series of the last five years and turned them into printed juggernauts. And these aren't just entertaining adaptations of the animation, they are comic book series that feel very much as original as the source material. With a focus on prominent webcomic creators, they've developed a following of both cartoon watchers and webcomic fans that fervently read every new issue. It is no easy feat to capture the unique feel of *Regular Show* with the misfit cast of park caretakers and their strange enemies. From the voices of Rigby and Mordecai to incredible psychedelic interpretations of the content, this series is really one of the best being published. And with *Adventure Time* and its extensive reach into male and female audiences and a very healthy cosplay movement, it has become the one series that children, teens, and adults can enjoy side by side at the comic shop. Read these comics with your kids and you will both be laughing and wondering what crazy adventures are next.

These age recommendations are suggestions only, and not the official individual publishers or licensees rating. They are meant as a guide to assist parents in making decisions; however, each parent should look over the comics and make their own judgments before sharing with children. Nothing beats reading comics with your kids!

TED ADAMS INTERVIEW

IDW's CEO And Publisher On The Fifteenth Anniversary Of The 'Wildly Diverse' Company

By Hannah Means - Shannon

IDW is rolling up to its fifteenth anniversary and for co-founder Ted Adams, it's always been a 'dream job' come true. But in fifteen years the company has grown and changed considerably, become more and more diverse in its offerings, from its early days as a 'creative service' company, to its breakthrough successes in comics, licensed properties, archival editions, and now gaming. Growing steadily and becoming so-multifaceted as a company is as much a series of challenges as opportunities, but Ted Adams sees patterns in IDW's own continuity including a commitment to quality and a simple response to fan demand and interest. Here's what IDW's CEO and Publisher had to say about the company's development over the past fifteen years, and about its future.

CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT THE EARLIEST IDEAS THAT LED TO CREATING IDW?

I knew I wanted to own my own business from a very young age. Growing up, my dad was a very successful businessman and politician and I learned a lot by watching him work.

When I went to college, I decided to get both my undergraduate and graduate degrees in business. When I studied for my MBA at Notre Dame, I worked with a variety of small businesses in the South Bend area. I have also been an avid reader my entire life so the idea of being able to read for work and publish books seemed like it would be a dream job.

I got the opportunity to work in comics and learn from some really smart entrepreneurs early on including Dean Mullaney and Beau Smith at Eclipse, Mike Richardson at Dark Horse, Jim Lee and John Nee at WildStorm, and Todd McFarlane.

All of this culminated into the founding of IDW. When it first began in 1999, there were four of us who started it: Robbie Robbins, Alex Garner, Kris Oprisko, and myself. Our earliest goals were to build a business that would allow us to work for ourselves and support our families.

WHAT WERE SOME EARLY SIGNS THAT IDW WOULD NOT ONLY SURVIVE, BUT BECOME A LONG-LIVED VENTURE?

First, it's important to remember that we didn't start publishing comics the first couple of years we were in business. We were a 'creative service' company, which meant that we provided art and graphic design to a wide range of entertainment companies.

While the early years were often a creative struggle, regularly working 20+ hour days, we paid ourselves salaries from day one and the company was profitable in its first year. The reason we were cash flow positive from our earliest days is that the four of us who started IDW all came from WildStorm

Productions. Kris Oprisko and I ran a creative service division for WildStorm that had a very robust roster of clients. When Jim Lee made the decision to sell WildStorm to DC, they didn't want to continue the creative service business so he and John Nee very generously allowed us to take over those clients, ensuring we had plenty of work before we even officially opened our doors for business.

WHAT DO YOU THINK WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISIONS MADE DURING IDW'S FIRST FIVE YEARS?

Since our creative service business was quickly successful, after a couple of years, we decided to take a gamble on one new venture per year. The first year, we shot a pilot for a television show called *Bar Talk* (never made it to a TV set near you). The following year, we published our first book, *Uno Fanta: The Art of Ashley Wood*. That same year, we published a novel called *Savage Membrane* by Steve Niles. This led us to publishing our first comic book, *30 Days of Night*, which became a huge success. We kept going with CSI, which was a success right out of the gate and have been publishing ever since.

Those books really set the direction for what we are today: a wildly diverse publishing company. In 2014, we will average 75+ books a month – including licensed books, creator owned books, Artist Editions, classic comic strip reprints, prose books, art books and more!

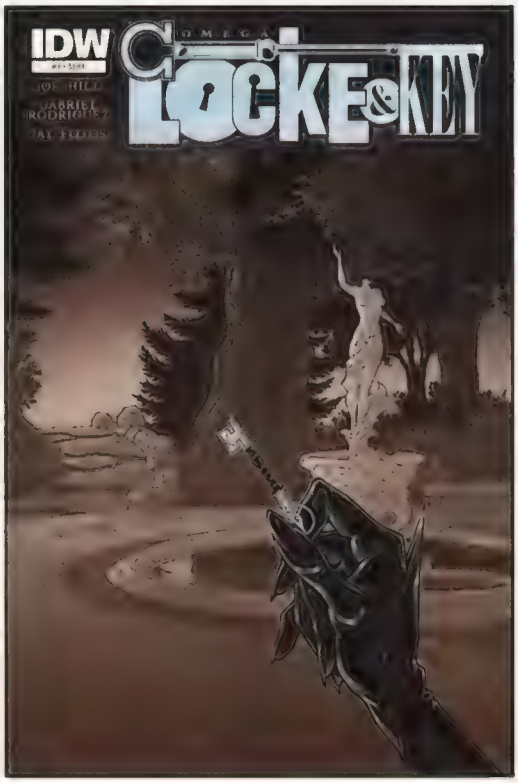
WERE THERE TIMES WHEN GROWING TOO QUICKLY WAS ACTUALLY A DANGER FOR THE COMPANY?

This probably won't come as a surprise to anyone that's paid attention to IDW over the years, but I like growth. Of course, there is risk associated with growth but I'm very careful not to bite off more than I can chew. I have a big appetite for books and want to publish as many great books as I can during my life. Luckily for me, my business partner, Robbie Robbins, shares that passion.

As I see it, there are two kinds of growth for IDW (and they only work together): Growth in the publishing schedule accompanied by growth in the number of employees who work for IDW. We've had steady growth since we started in 1999 and that has accelerated even more over the last 5 years. And to state what is hopefully the obvious, IDW's success over the last 15 years couldn't have happened if I hadn't taken the gamble to bring on some extremely talented people. Many of them were already established in the world of comics, including Chris Ryall, Greg Goldstein, John Barber, Dirk Wood, David Hedgecock, Sarah Gaydos, and Scott Dunbier. Many have become well known in comics, including Denton Tipton, Carlos Guzman, Chris Mowry, Justin Eisinger, and Bobby Curnow. Behind-the scenes folks who have been integral to our success include Matt Ruzicka, Jeff Webber, Jerry Bennington, Marci Hubbard, Lorelei Bunjes, Mike Ford, and many, many others.

What do you think are the most significant developments for the company in the past five years?

In the last five years, IDW has blossomed into a major publisher, securing the #4 (and on many occasions the #3 spot) on Diamond's monthly market share chart. In December 2013, we accounted for more than 8% of all comics sold in comic shops. That was accomplished by a focus on producing high quality books in every category. During the last five years we've accomplished a lot that makes me very proud:



- Established IDW as the #1 publisher of licensed comics. In addition to the huge commercial success we've had with well-known properties like *Transformers* and *My Little Pony*, we've also taken properties like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Godzilla*, that were selling dismally with other publishers, and turned them into long-running series that were on many 2013 'best comics of the year' lists.
- Published amazing creator-driven books like Darwyn Cooke's *Parker* adaptation and Joe Hill and Gabriel Rodriguez's Locke & Key.
- Pioneered the Artist Edition format, giving readers a chance to see original art in a way they never could before.
- We've been the home to hundreds of amazing writers and artists who have done thousands of comic books for us. Highlights for me include: *Kill Shakespeare* by Anthony Del Col, Conor McCreery, and Andy Belanger; Roger Langridge's *Popeye*; everything we do with Ash Wood including *Lore* and *Zombies vs. Robots* (co-created and written by IDW's CCO and Editor-in-Chief, Chris Ryall); *Monocyte* by Menton3 and Kasra Ghanbari; *Mars Attacks* by John Layman and John McCrea; *Memorial* by Chris Roberson and Rich Ellis; and *Comic Book History of Comics* by Fred Van Lente and Ryan Dunleavy.
- Published more than 100 books with Dean Mullaney and Bruce Canwell's Library of American Comics (LOAC). I love every single one of the LOAC books but nothing ever gets in the way of me catching up with our *Dick Tracy* and *Little Orphan Annie* collections and Dean and Bruce's biography of Alex Toth that currently spans two books (with the third on the way in 2014) is easily one of the best things I'll ever publish.
- We're also the proud home of Yoe Books. Like Dean and Bruce, Craig and Clizia are dedicated to examining and archiving the history of comics. While LOAC focuses on comic strips, Yoe Books typically looks at comic books. *Comics About Cartoonists* and *The Art of Steve Ditko* are two of my favorites.
- Started new divisions like IDW Limited (which focuses on high-end collectible editions of our books), IDW Games (which produces board games) and IDW Entertainment (set up so we can develop and finance our own TV shows).
- Increased the number of art books we publish including: more books with Ash Wood; sketchbooks with Sam Kieth, Tim Bradstreet, and William M. Kaluta; and *The Worlds of Sam Kieth*, a book that I think every artist, or aspiring artist, should read.

How do you handle attitudes that place licensed comics in a box of limited artistic accomplishment?

I have no idea why anyone would place a different value on a 'licensed' book. Superman, Transformers, Spider-Man, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, X-Men, G. I. Joe – all of those characters got their start in comic books. Why some should be looked down upon as 'licensed books' and others shouldn't, has never made any sense to me. Our goal is to always bring on editors and creators who are passionate about the characters. I love that the quality of our books is both recognized by critics and readers.

Can you tell us a little bit about your view of the role of creator owned comics in the comics market right now?

Our first comic book was a creator-owned book (*30 Days of Night*). Since then, we've published hundreds of creator-owned series over the years.

Also, I have found there is nothing better than working with creators to bring new characters to the world. I'm so proud of *Locke & Key* that I have five pages of Gabriel Rodriguez's original art hanging up in our house – so, you can read a sequence while you walk up the stairs.

In 2014, we have some BIG creator-owned books coming out that we can't wait for the world to see:

- *V-Wars* by Jonathan Maberry and Alan Robinson. This is one of our Free Comic Book Day comics this year and it spins out of a successful prose anthology we published.
- *Winterworld* by Chuck Dixon and Butch Guice, expanding the world that Chuck created with Jorge Zaffino.
- *Little Nemo in Slumberland* by Eric Shanower and Gabriel Rodriguez. A new version of the classic Winsor McCay comic strip.
- *Ragnarok*. Walt Simonson. Norse Gods. 'nuff said?

What are your feelings about preserving comics important to comic tradition in your art comic books? Do you see this curatorial role increasing in the next few years for IDW as great comics of the past are reassessed and given more attention?

No question I see this as one of our responsibilities. Beyond the work that's done by LOAC and Yoe Books, we also publish a wide range of art books that include an examination of the artist's career. One of the best examples is *Woodwork* which focuses on Wally Wood.

Do you see the current outreach into tabletop gaming as a natural extension of the comic properties that inspired them, or was gaming a goal, and these properties were simply the most logical ones to develop into gaming?

IDW Games comes from our continued desire to grow, as we discussed before. We've partnered with a well-established game company (Pandasaurus Games) and we have hit the ground running. You are going to quickly see a large portfolio of IDW games, some based on our comics and some that aren't.

IDW SEEMS TO BE STRONGLY AWARE OF THE VARIATION IN READER DEMAND FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF READING EXPERIENCES, FROM DIGITAL TO SINGLE ISSUES, TRADE COLLECTIONS, AND HIGH-END ARCHIVAL EDITIONS. SOME FORMATS MUST BE MORE PROFITABLE THAN OTHERS FOR THE COMPANY AND CREATORS CONCERNED, SO TO WHAT EXTENT ARE YOU COMMITTED TO PRESERVING ALL OF THESE OPTIONAL FORMATS FOR READERS?

Comics are a unique medium in that print and digital are actually very complimentary. There's a great continuum from digital catalogs to print comics to collected Limited Editions.

Our digital comics are available on every platform, so a whole new audience is discovering comics by browsing in their living room, or anyplace they carry their tablet or smartphone. For a large part, these are more casual readers that are not concerned about 'collecting' . . . they are just enjoying a great story. They can jump into a storyline from the point they choose, since we have nearly 3,000 issues available. Digital is a wonderful way for new readers, especially kids, to discover comics.

Then our print business serves more dedicated readers, who want a comic the first day it comes out, or want a high-end collectible edition of their favorite title. And quite honestly, many people just enjoy the experience of being away from a screen and holding a paper book!

Our IDW readers may be interested in any mix of those products. They may be a casual reader of one title, but a hard-core collector of another. And some fans want a copy both in print and digital. So we want to make sure all our books are there to meet each reader's personal preference.

AS YOU LOOK AHEAD AT NEW POTENTIAL LICENSED PROPERTIES FOR IDW, WHAT QUALITIES ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

These are a few of the things we look for when we examine a new opportunity:

- Does it have a champion internally? Is there an editor who has a vision for how it would work for comics?
- Does it have a large built-in existing audience?
- Are we already in business with the licensor? If not, do they have reasonable expectations (financially and creatively)?

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE COMPANY RIGHT NOW?

2013 was a great year for just about every comic publisher and it was easily IDW's best year.

Our goal is to continue to build on that success and to continue to bring new readers into the comics medium and comic stores. This includes:

- New readers who will pick up one of our comics because they loved the (upcoming) *Transformers* or *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* movies.
- New readers who discovered our comics on one of their digital devices.
- New readers who bought one of our Micro Comic Fun Packs at a mass-market retailer.

THE NEW FACES OF 2014'S BLOCKBUSTER MOVIES

By Linda Ge

We've gotten used to spending the summer with Robert Downey Jr. and his merry band of Avengers, Christian Bale and the dark, depressing gang in Gotham, or those Fast and Furious speed racers, but the beauty of the summer blockbuster season is that fights and explosions take care of most of the heavy lifting, and the humans who get to run around in the middle and try to survive it all don't necessary have to be movie stars to draw in an audience. Instead, we get to meet them as they dodge that falling meteor or save humanity from an apocalyptic event and decide whether or not we'd like to see more of them.

The blockbuster is a gig that doesn't necessarily lead to an unknown actor becoming the next movie star, but for relatively unknown upstarts, it's a calculated risk worth taking. For every Brandon Routh, there's a Chris Hemsworth, after all. This summer will introduce us to a whole new crop of new franchise stars, and if they do well here, we could be seeing a lot more of them in the future. Here are eight that we will be keeping an eye on as they embark upon their first summer of block busting.

ELIZABETH OLSEN

Elizabeth Olsen, who has already done her best to prove she's serious about acting and shown she's got the chops, garnering rave reviews for Sundance drama *Martha Marcy May Marlene*, doesn't necessarily seem the most natural fit for a summer blockbuster female lead, but it's a sign of the times that sexy-but-one-dimensional is out and smart-and-capable is in. With those parameters, Olsen works perfectly. It's not until 2015 that she'll join the bona fide glittering dynasty of Marvel's cinematic universe as Scarlet Witch, but this summer, we'll get a preview of her blockbuster prowess when she takes on Gareth Edwards' *Godzilla*. She'll have a little help from Aaron Johnson and Bryan Cranston in fending off the iconic, rebooted Japanese monster, but Olsen has grit and determination in spades, so let's hope her character gets to take care of herself, too.

JACK REYNOR

No one had heard the name Jack Reynor when he started popping up on shortlists for big upcoming tent-poles like *Divergent*, but that's because the general audience hadn't yet seen Irish indie drama *What Richard Did*, in which Reynor gives a complex, mesmerizing performance as a young man with everything going for him who stands to lose it all over one bad decision. But obviously Hollywood bigwigs got an early look, and Michael Bay came calling for Reynor first, casting him opposite Mark Wahlberg in his the latest of his own hit franchise, *Transformers*. How will Reynor

fare amongst Optimus Prime and his band of fellow giant alien robots? Shia LaBeouf did pretty well, at least when you look back at what he's been up to since, and there are comparisons that can be made between the two actors. The first trilogy did amazing things for LaBeouf's career, and Reynor certainly has the potential to catapult the inevitable box office glory of *Age of Extinction* into a resume that's just as impressive. Though, hopefully, he won't flame out in quite such spectacular fashion.

TUPPENCE MIDDLETON

British actress Tuppence Middleton has been working steadily and building a solid portfolio of work in the UK, mostly in cracking mini-indies like the superb *Skeletons* and on TV, but this summer she takes a giant step into the Hollywood mainstream. She's going to be starring in the Wachowskis' highly anticipated *Jupiter Ascending* alongside Mila Kunis and

Channing Tatum. Kunis takes the title role of a wayward intergalactic princess and Channing Tatum is the assassin sent to guard her. Though most details are still securely under wraps, Middleton appears to have the juicy role of the film's main villain. Quite a coup for a still relatively unknown young actress.

DANE DEHAAN

It's not like Dane DeHaan hasn't played a superpowered villain before. His role as Andrew in Josh Trank's *Chronicle* was riveting and must have prepared him well to take on a baddie of a somewhat more iconic nature. As Harry Osborn in *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, DeHaan will both align with and goes against Andrew Garfield as Peter Parker, Harry's childhood friend, and Spider-Man, the Green Goblin's sworn enemy. "Enemies Unite" is one of the film's tag lines, and the younger Osborn's transformation from friend to foe will probably be a major part of the storyline for not just this film, but the already announced villain-focused sequels

and spinoffs as well. Good thing DeHaan's got the 'slightly creepy intensity that just about bubbles over into villainy' down pat, while we can also trust him to maintain empathy and an emotional connection to the audience. Marc Webb's modern take on Spider-Man has definitely met his match.

JASON CLARKE

Rugged, outdoorsy Australian actors have long made successful Hollywood leading men, and Jason Clarke looks to keep the tradition going as the newest export from Down Under to headline a big budget blockbuster (following in the footsteps of Mel Gibson, Hugh Jackman, Russell Crowe, and others). Sure, *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* isn't actually the first film in the franchise - that was 2012's *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* - but Clarke's character looks poised to be more of a traditional action hero than James Franco's paternal scientist got to be in the first film. Roles in *Lawless* and *Zero Dark Thirty* have well prepared him to bring the dramatic gravitas needed for today's more serious action movies to succeed, and he's not stopping at Apes, as he's also just signed on to play the new John Connor in next summer's *Terminator* reboot, *Genesis*.

EMILY VAN CAMP

It seemed like Marvel saw every young actress in town for the juicy role of Sharon Carter, distant relative to Peggy Carter and the modern day love of Chris Evan's Steve Rogers to be introduced in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. When the dust settled, it wasn't Felicity Jones, Anna Kendrick, Emilia Clarke, or any of the usual suspects who landed the part, but Emily Van Camp, a face very familiar to TV audiences thanks to her long-running roles on *Everwood* and *Brothers and Sisters*. And anyone who's watched her alter-ego on the ABC show *Revenge* knows she's quite the natural fit for the ass-kicking SHIELD agent. Her casting probably also all but guarantees that Sharon will be showing up on *Agents of SHIELD* at some point in the near future.

ANTHONY MACKIE

Sam Wilson is credited as being the first African-American comic book superhero and we can't wait to see how Anthony Mackie, who has been impressive in plenty of supporting screen roles already, brings Falcon to life. Chris Evans had Sebastian Stan playing his supportive best friend Bucky Barnes in the first film, but as the title of the sequel may suggest, the Winter Soldier isn't in such a good mood when he returns on the side of the bad guys. Enter Wilson, whose superpower has its own dark roots, but when he's strapped into a metallic flying suit with wings and all, he manages to not lose his mind or his conscience, and immediately partners up with Cap to aid

him and S.H.I.E.L.D. with crime fighting in modern day New York. Mackie exudes charm and street smarts, making him ideal for contrasting against Evans' introverted, by-the-books Steve, who's a soldier through and through. Bucky will probably return, but we're hoping Sam will stick around too.

CHRIS PRATT

Those of us who've watched and enjoyed Chris Pratt's goofball tendencies on TV shows like *Everwood* and *Parks and Recreation* probably could never have predicted he'd become a bonafide action hero and a movie-star-in-training, but *Guardians of the Galaxy* is about to make him exactly that. He's more prepared than you'd think though, with dramatic roles in *Moneyball* and *Zero Dark Thirty* proving he's got range and chops - not to mention an ability to totally transform his body into superhero proportions, in the case of the latter. The best part is that his *Guardians* role as Peter Quill, aka Star-Lord, allows him to retain that keen comedic timing that he's famous for while kicking intergalactic ass.

From Star-Lord to Falcon, from Harry Osborn to intergalactic villains, there's a lot to tackle for 2014's class of blockbuster newbies, and the actors we've profiled are but a handful of those who will be doing their best to make an impression amidst green-screened, CGI-ed chaos. The world will be watching.

THE PULL LIST
by James Kuhoric

It's kids month here at Bleeding Cool Magazine. Consider this an opportunity for the young and the old to find the best comics that ignite the child at heart. And really, shouldn't comics do that every day? I always judge how good a comic is by how it made me feel. Was there a little of the magic there that could transport me back to 1980 when I read that very first comic and ignited a lifelong passion? Very few comics can capture that, but the ones that do are very special. This month in the Pull List we're focusing on the newest springtime comics that have the best chance of bringing out the kid in you and me.

There are many great comics out there...but these are a few the most anticipated ones from my March and April wish list.

Amazing Spider-Man #1

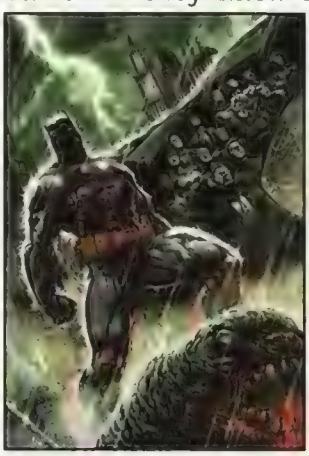
Throw away the cynicism, the history of Spider-Man reboots, and the last year plus of Superior Spider-Puss and what do you have? This is the character that changed the face of comics forever embarking on a new adventure in the return to his flagship title. Now the folks at Marvel know a little something about creating events, but please, please, please let this be as special as it should be. It's not just another Marvel Now! title that will rank high on the monthly sales chart. It's *Amazing Spider-Man*. We are trusting you (Marvel) to treat this like the event that it should be. This should be a celebration of one of comics' greatest characters. I want to read this issue and feel wide-eyed again as I see Peter Parker return to the role of Spider-Man.

Love It: There's nothing more perfectly suited to recapture your childhood than the character that sparked your love for comics.

Hate It: The letdown potential here is huge.

If this is just another hum-drum of a comic, it will do more damage than good.

Honorable Mention (Super Heroes): *Batman Eternal #1*- Most parents would blanch if they knew how dark the core *Batman* title is these days. But the comics have been spectacular if a bit on the mature side. DC is stepping out on a limb testing out a weekly Batman comic, but with Scott Snyder at the helm, I'm very excited to see what they do with it. Bring on the weekly Batman!



Star Wars: Rebel Heist #1

Is there any recipe for pure childhood joy that doesn't include a galaxy far, far away? Star Wars has sparked childhood imaginations for nearly four decades with colorful alien characters and roguish heroes. Whether you started with *A New Hope* or with *Revenge of the Sith*, Star Wars holds a little magic for most kids that experience the epic saga in their youth. And while there may be a plethora of Star Wars comics to choose from, this one looks quite special. Han Solo was one of the best characters of the original trilogy. His unique mix of scoundrel and hero made him loved by millions of kids that all wanted to imitate his snappy patter and charm. With Matt Kindt at the helm, I am expecting this series to transport me back to a time when I still believed a farm boy could become a hero and when scoundrels shot first.

Love It: This has the potential to be one of the best *Star Wars* comics ever. I want to see Han Solo like he was in *Star Wars: A New Hope* before it was altered!

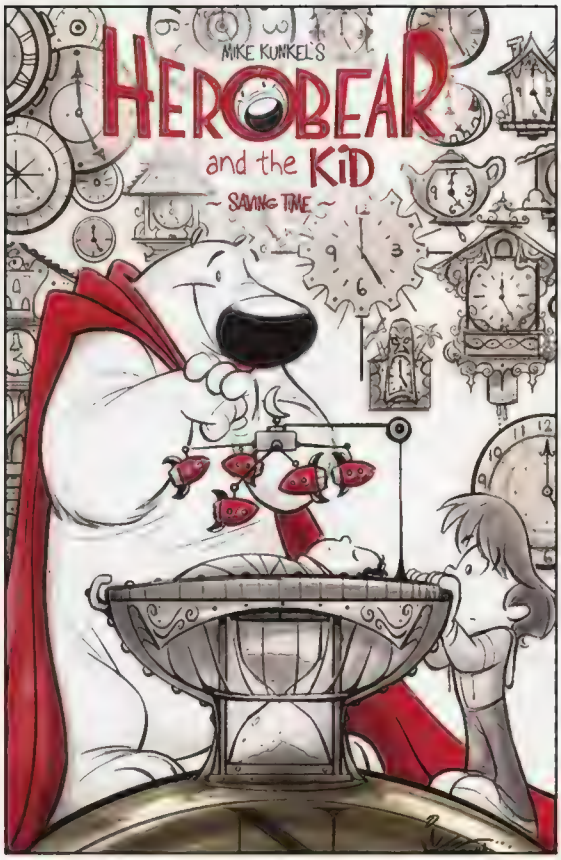
Hate It: It doesn't have to be epic, but it does have to capture the unique character and voice of Han Solo. Miss that mark and this is just another Star Wars comic.

Honorable Mention (Sci-Fi Heroes): *Flash Gordon #1*- First *The Shadow*, then *Doc Savage*, and now the holy grail of sci-fi pulp characters, Flash Gordon! Dynamite knows how to recreate the heroes of yesteryear with the same larger than life action mixed in with modern day storytelling. I trust the creative team of Jeff Parker and Evan Shaner to deliver the action of one of my favorite all-time characters. If this doesn't bring you back to Sam Jones and the Queen soundtrack, I don't know what will. Death to Ming!

Herobear& the Kid: Saving Time #1

Now I will admit that I was a cynical adult when *Herobear and the Kid* first came out. But that didn't stop it from being one of the most enjoyable comics I'd read in a very long time. The mix of imagination and brilliant animation illustration is a recipe for pure reading joy. I can promise you, anyone who picks up this series and doesn't walk away with a smile on their face afterward has a heart that is three sizes too small. Reading *Herobear and the Kid* is like opening a long forgotten pathway in your heart to the child within. You can't help but love it.

Love It: Mike Kunkle expresses such pure

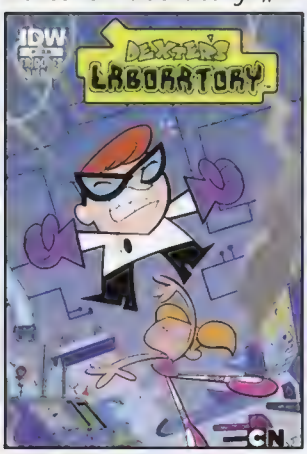


joy in these books that you can feel a child's wonder as you read it.

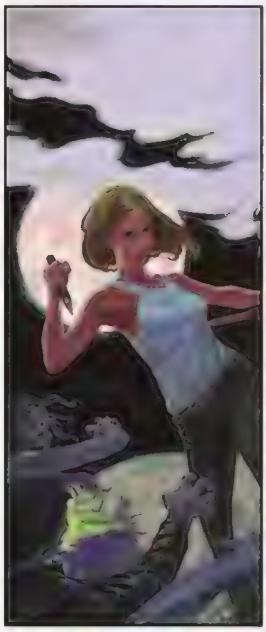
Hate It: What happens if the magic is gone...

Honorable Mention (Kids):

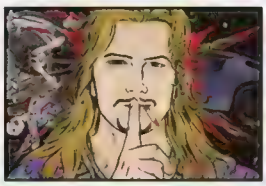
Dexter's Laboratory #1- DeeDee! I can still hear Dexter's distinct voice screaming his sister's name as she dances her way across his experiments. This is a series that was so much fun to watch. I was a child of the Looney Tunes and Hannna Barbera age. But Dexter's Laboratory was able to take those same crazy antics and update them for new generations to enjoy. Alongside the *Powerpuff Girls*, IDW has reanimated a wonderful piece of childhood animation antics.



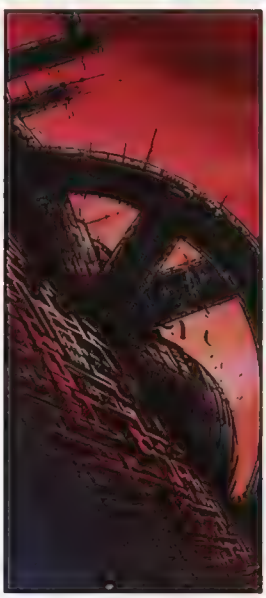
Those are the books I'm adding to my pull list this spring. Here are a few others I'll be watching out for as well:



Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Season 10 #1 – Dark Horse has perfected the extended season series with *Buffy* and *Angel*. Fans of the TV show will find this series a faithful and fulfilling read.

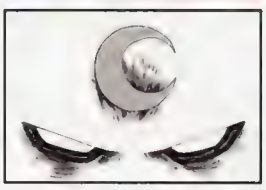


Stray Bullets #1 – David Lapham's long out of print crime noir series returns! Once upon a time this was required reading. I can't wait to see if the fire is still burning.

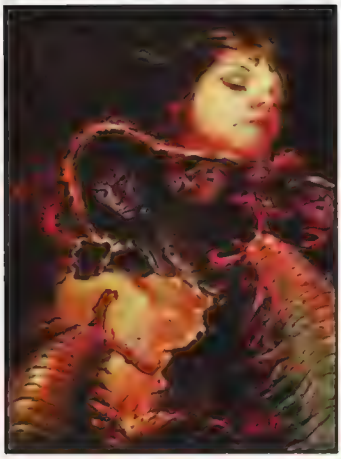


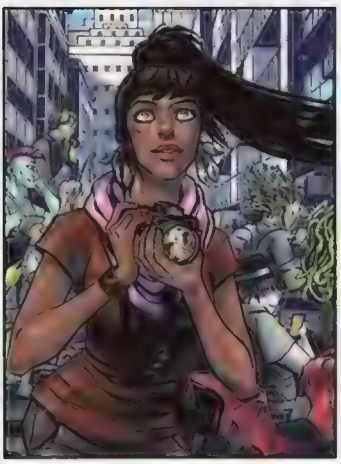
Caliban #1 – Garth Ennis telling a sci-fi horror story in the "vein of Alien?" Alright, Mr. Ennis, you have my money now let's see the goods.

Moon Knight #1 – I had all but given up on Moon Knight, but with Warren Ellis spinning the tale you have to take notice.



Conan the Avenger #1 – I'm a little biased in that I'd read just about any Conan story, but





a new series by Fred Van Lente that pits an angry barbarian against vile supernatural monsters? Sign me up!

Evil Empire #1 –Max Bemis sold me on *Polarity*, I'm excited to see what he has up his sleeve for the sophomore offering.

Shutter #1 – Joe Keatinge delivers "Indiana Jones for the 21st Century." Bold claim, my friend, but you have my attention and I can't wait to read it.

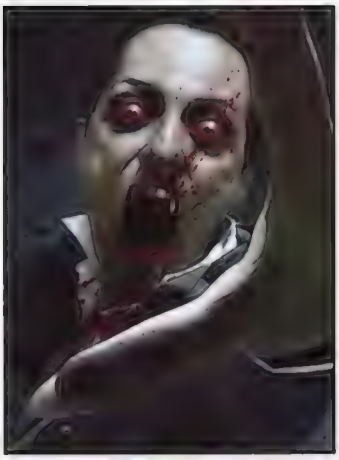
Solar: Man of the Atom #1 – Always my favorite of the Gold Key characters; I am very excited to see what the new incarnation of the nuclear man has in store for us.

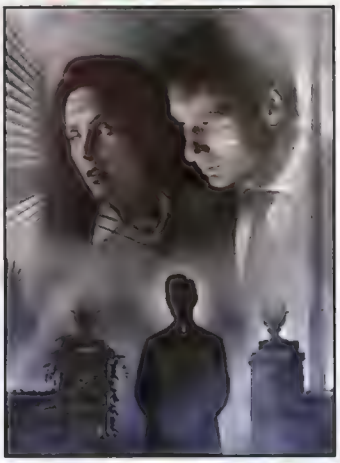
V-Wars #1 – Wow...I consider myself well read in horror, but how did I miss this book by Jonathan Maberry? The comic series looks like a bloody good time.

Justice League United #0 – Justice League Canada? Er...Okay.

X-Files Annual – IDW is doing up *The X-Files* right. I love *Season 10* and can't get enough Mulder and Scully. The truth is out there, but it's going to cost you $7.99 to find it.

Shadowman: End Times #1 – *Shadowman* is one of Valiant's best series and you can count on this living up to its title.





HUNTING FOR TOYS:

A Conversation With TV's Toy Hunter

By James Kuhoric

You can't help but smile while watching the opening credits of Travel Channel's hit series, *Toy Hunter*. Intrepid toy chaser, Jordan Hembrough searches dusty garages, flea markets, and comic conventions for the toys of his youth, and while securing items for a tidy profit, he manages to recapture a bit of his childhood at the same time. It's not only the thrill of the hunt for Jordan and his cohort toy soldiers, but also the love of the toys themselves. Seeing the impish glee in Jordan's eyes when he uncovers something that, as a child he owned or coveted, ignites a bit of the same in the viewer. With each find, a 1970s Mego stash, a Six Million Dollar Man Bionic Bigfoot, and a rare Batman figure, Jordan relives his childhood and takes us along for the ride.

I think the most refreshing part of the series is that regardless of the money he hopes to make flipping a prospective toy to a new owner, Jordan really seems to care about preserving the past by salvaging these finds and putting them in the hands of people that will cherish them. Along the way he encounters celebrities that are also looking to share his dream of finding those glory days gone by with a small piece of plastic nostalgia. Jordan has already found toys for the likes of Gene Simmons, Danny Bonaduce, and Kenny Baker. As the show enters its third season the stars continue to shine with Daryl "DMC" Daniels, Hulk Hogan, and even notorious actor Gary Busey getting in on the shenanigans. And through each client we get to watch them reclaim a small part of their past by reconnecting with childhood memories via a vintage toy. The list of celebrities has my interest piqued as I ponder just what toy Hulk Hogan may want to connect with and if Jordan comes up short on the quest to find it, if the Hulkster will run wild on our resident Indiana Jones of toys?

Bleeding Cool had an opportunity to talk with Jordan about the *Toy Hunter* show in this candid interview and found out there is more to the toy-man than his quest to recapture the past one toy at a time. The first thing we wanted to know was simply what it is like living your dream professionally.

So few people find satisfaction in the work they do and watching the *Toy Hunter* program clearly depicts a man who loves his occupation. "This is truly a dream come true for me. We are going on our third season and it just keeps getting better and better. This season, you will see a lot more pop culture intertwined with the stories and toys, which I love. I wake up each morning and say 'You are one lucky guy and have the best job in the world," said Hembrough.

One of the best parts of the program is watching Jordan's genuine excitement in discovering old toys. That happiness seems to come from fond memories of his own childhood and being reunited with these forgotten plastic treasures must surely feel like finding a long lost friend. We asked Jordan what his favorite toy and childhood memory was and he shared a story that isn't unlike many children of the 1970's. "It has to be the vintage Kenner Star Wars line," he said. "That movie and the sequels got me into my love of toys and collecting, and truly sparked my imagination for writing and acting. And to think...it all started with one little Luke Skywalker figure!" I could relate to that on a very real level. Star Wars toys were a big part of my past growing up and I had the opportunity to see that love of the toys recaptured in my sons' eyes over the past decade. In that way we share a link with past and present through the love of a child's toy and it creates a special bond.

Jordan has hunted toys for many celebrities and has even more coming up in the new season. At one point he found Star Wars toys for Kenny Baker, the actor who played R2D2. With his love for Star Wars, that had to be one of the special memories that the Toy Hunter will treasure for a lifetime. But just who would he want to meet if he could have any famous client? Is there a "holy grail" of collectors that he would want to find toys for? His answer surprised me, it wasn't a 70's or 80's celebrity as I had imagined, but actually a very modern day actor. "I have been really lucky with the people I have worked with," Hembrough said. "They have all been true collectors and share my passion for toys, pop culture, and collecting. But if

hard pressed, I would say Seth MacFarlane is my dream client. The guy is so talented, so creative, and I heard he collects. Just to have him out with me on the road would be amazing."

After sharing a few very bad *Family Guy* impersonations, we eventually moved on to discussing personal collections and collecting. As an amateur toy collector, I asked the questions that I think most prospective new enthusiasts would want to know. Exactly how should someone get into collecting vintage toys? What were the secrets and the tips for starting a collection of trinkets from the past? Jordan smiled at the thought of new collectors and prospective clients and said to "Collect what you LOVE. Don't worry about making money or selling the entire collection. Just have fun! That's what this whole hobby is about; fun and entertainment. The toy collecting can be incredibly social as well. I am finding that people are actually talking over social media sites and getting together to share stories and show off their collections." And as he spoke about collecting you could see the excitement in his eyes that underscored the joy he feels about the hobby.

As someone who has been hunting for toys for almost his entire life, we talked about Jordan's excitement of "the find." When after hours of searching and turning up nothing you finally stumbled upon that one rare item that you connected with or

vintage toy collecting was? Was there anything he could share that would give Bleeding Cool readers a leg up on finding the next "lost ark" of plastic treasure? With a sly smile he said, "That is the ultimate question in all of collecting. I actually tell people it's a trick question, because there is no 'right or wrong' answer. Each person has his or her own personal Holy Grail. What may be rare or exciting to me may not be to someone else. The truly special thing about this hobby is the 'uniqueness' it brings to each individual. Everyone collects for their own reasons and every collection is personal."

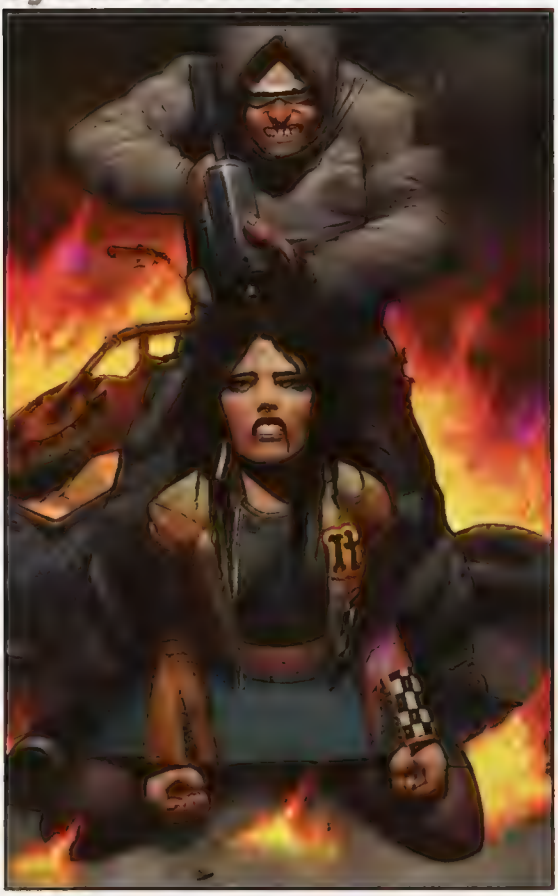
With Jordan's excitement harnessed I set out to find a piece of my childhood one action figure at a time. Next on my hunting list... the elusive Big Jim's Action Pack figure.

that your client was looking for. And in discussing the thrill of the hunt we shifted gears to talk about the best score he'd ever found. Smiling ear-to-ear he let me in on the find that defined his career. "You know, up until this season I was always telling people about this incredible Star Wars figure I found about ten years ago," Hembrough said. "It was a prototype of Boba Fett, the notorious bounty hunter from *The Empire Strikes Back*. However, this season I traveled to England and truly found something incredible. It has to be one of my favorite toys and dates back all the way to the 1960's. I can't tell you what it is yet, you have to watch the show. I will say though that it is truly 'Heroic' in stature."

With me duly tantalized with his tease for this season's big find, we started to wrap up the conversation with one last tip. What insider info could he give, just between friends, about what the holy grail of

CHANGE IS COMING: 13 COINS DOES THINGS DIFFERENTLY

By Dan Wickline



Hard to say just how long *13 Coins* has been rolling around as a concept, but the first we at Bleeding Cool heard of it was in October of 2010 when we got to see some images done by the amazing Simon Bisley. Now over three years later I've finally had a chance to sit down and read the first four issues and I'll admit... it was worth the wait. We've seen a lot of variations of the Angels on Earth idea, but this one is unique. Throw on top of that some mind-blowing 3-D digital effects and Corinthian has itself a game-changing property. This comic truly utilizes the capabilities of the digital playground. But beside the technology and the Bisley art, we have a great story penned by the screenwriting team that brought you *Hitman: Absolution*, Martin Brennan and Michael B. Jackson.

Let's get readers pulled in right away. What is your sales-pitch that will get the readers who have never picked up *13 Coins* to throw their money down?

Michael B Jackson: Every culture, every religion has one thing in common: Angels. You could be the descendant of an Angel and not know it. What makes some athletes elite? Why does LeBron James score 30 points so effortlessly, and dunk over anyone who gets in his way? Why are some people incredible natural soldiers, warriors, or fighters? MMA fighters don't just fight for the money. They fight because they love it. Why? Could it be an inherited gene? A gene that makes them thirst for combat, thirst for competition. What if that gene is in you, laying dormant...waiting...for someone to turn it on? What if you had this ability to become one step above elite? What would you do? How would it change you? Could you stay strong and change the world like Bruce Lee? Or would you bow to corruption like Mike Tyson?

Martin Brennan: Exactly, *13 Coins* puts being a superhero within the reach of reality. No irradiated spider bites. No crash landing from another planet. Just a simple proposal: You could be the descendant of an Angel. The first series of *13 Coins* (Issues 1-6) is pretty much the origin of our superhero, John Pozner. Only by Issue 6 will readers discover exactly what John will become.

Your story is based on biblical mythos, but I'm not familiar with Semyaza other than he was a fallen angel. Who is Semyaza and how much of what appears in the book is from biblical mythos and how much is your own extrapolation?

Brennan: The idea for the back story is taken from biblical scriptures, yes. But a healthy bit of fictional license is mixed in. For example, according to the Book of

Enoch, Semyaza is portrayed as the leader of the band of Watcher Angels who become the Fallen Angels. And it is Azazel not Semyaza who is bound hand and foot and cast in to a pit in Dudael. But for our story, we felt it was more important to have the leader of the Fallen Angels bound and imprisoned.

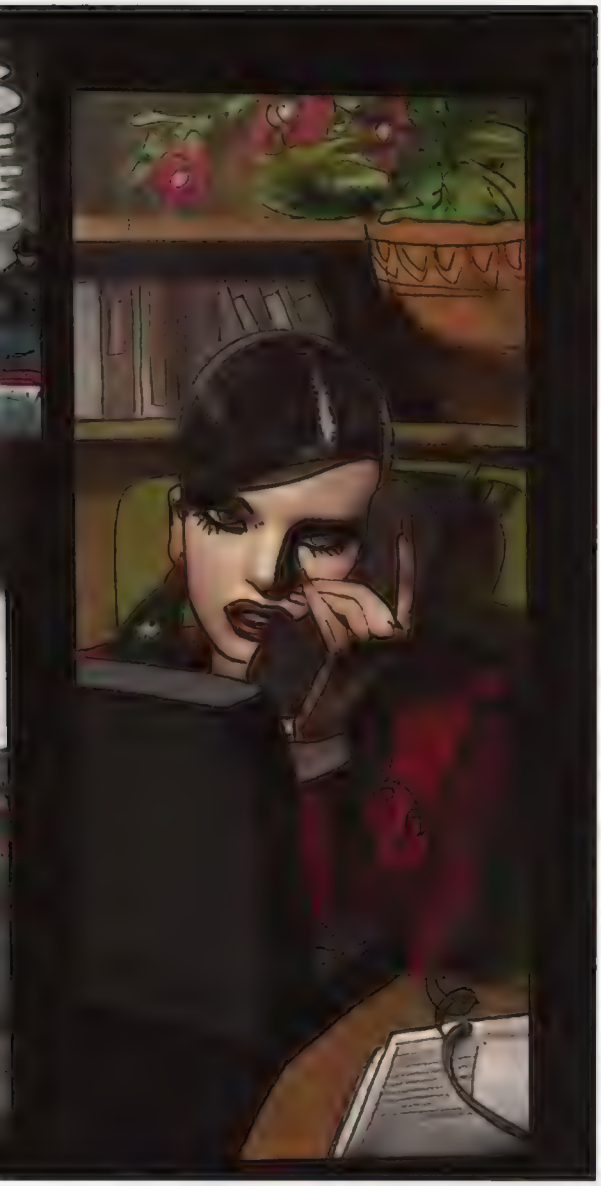
JACKSON: The chain being cut away and taken to earth and melted down into coins is entirely of our imagination, but we believe it is a great metaphor for "money being the root of all evil." Using the story of Noah as backdrop to explain how the Nephilim gene spread across the world allows us to blend in stories from all cultures. Noah's children scattered and bred with people all over the world, therefore Nephilim could be anywhere and everywhere.

NOW YOU'VE MIXED SCIENCE AND RELIGION HERE BY INTRODUCING THE NEPHILIM GENE. HOW DOES THIS WORK IF PASSED DOWN FROM A SINGLE PARENT? WHAT ABOUT FROM BOTH PARENTS MAKING A "TRUE BLOOD?" AND WHAT MAKES A "FIRST BORN" SO MUCH MORE POWERFUL AND CLOSER TO BEING AN ANGEL?

BRENNAN: This idea is nothing new, really. Royalty has done it for years to keep wealth in the family. Egyptian pharaohs did it because they were considered gods or descended from gods. So there was strict control over the bloodline. *13 Coins* takes that concept to another level. If Noah knew he was the descendant of an Angel, and was put on earth to fight the descendants of Fallen Angels, he would want his descendants to retain as much of whatever abilities was passed on to him from his Angelic father as possible. So arranged marriages would be the norm. Except wealth would not be a factor. Angelic lineage would be the one and only consideration.

JACKSON: The stronger your Angelic lineage, the stronger your Nephilim gene.

If only one parent is an Angelic descendant, then the gene is weakened--watered down like cheap liquor. The concept of "First Born" being more powerful and closest to being an Angel is actually based on my family. Not that my family is descended from angels, but my oldest sister is the eldest of my siblings. She is the tallest at 5'10" and most like my father, who was an extremely gifted athlete back in his time. Me, I'm 5'4", a couple of inches taller than my mom. All the good genes got used up before they got to me. That's where the concept of "First Born" being closer to being an Angel came from.



BESIDES THE RELIGIOUS ASPECT OF THE SERIES THERE IS ALSO A POLITICAL COMMENTARY GOING ON WITH THE CORRUPT POLITICIAN AND THE ASA. IS THERE A REAL WORLD MESSAGE BEING FOLDED INTO THE PAGES OF YOUR STORY?

JACKSON: There's definitely a political message. US politics today suck. Politicians don't give a damn about serving the people. They want to make as much money as they can and retire to the motivational speaker circuit. They are petty minded individuals who can't look past their own desires to see what would truly benefit not only our country, but the world. That whole shutting down the bridge in Jersey is a prime example. There was no forethought in to who could have gotten hurt. They are petty minded, weak, lying snakes that are in it for the money and the power – Just like Senator Graham in our story. It irritates me when we try to put them on pedestals. Or when they (politicians) play that "holier than thou" role. Politicians aren't royalty, and shouldn't be treated that way. They are public servants and should be—no—MUST be reminded of it. But we have a great story twist coming with Senator Graham. He's going to become one of the best characters in *13 Coins* as the series progresses.

THE STORY IS CALLED *13 COINS* AND THE COINS ARE MADE OF THE CHAINS THAT BOUND SEMYAZA... BUT SO FAR WE'VE SEEN JUST ONE COIN. CAN A SINGLE COIN RESTART THE WAR IN HEAVEN? DO YOU HAVE PLANS FOR ALL THE INDIVIDUAL COINS?

BRENNAN: The war for Heaven will be renewed if Semyaza is freed, and Earth will crumble. But the location of the prison is the greatest secret in the universe known only by God and the Angel who put Semyaza there. After the great war in Heaven, a Seer Angel prophesied that the Fallen leader would one day be freed when a First Born of True Blood parents touches the blood-stained chain that bound Semyaza. Knowing the Fallen had smelted a section of that chain into coins and had hidden them, the SON passed a law that all First Borns were killed at birth. If there are no First Born children within the SON, then the prophecy cannot come true. That is, until John Pozner slipped through the net.

JACKSON: Each of the 13 coins contains the spell or essence of one of the Semyaza's lieutenant demons that escaped to earth. A First Born would be able to resist the evil influence of one, two, maybe three coins. Not even the most powerful First Born

(John) could resist the influence of all 13 coins. We have plans for stories based around individual coins. Some of these stories will be in the form of prequels that will further explain and deepen the legend of the coins and The SON throughout our history. But all 13 coins will come into play before the end of Issue 6.

WHAT IS THE ART PROCESS FOR THIS SERIES? I NOTICED THERE WERE POINTS IT SEEMED LIKE 3D MODELING MAY HAVE BEEN USED FOR POSES AND OF COURSE THERE IS THAT AMAZING 3D COVER THAT ALLOWS THE VIEWER TO SWING AROUND THE SUBJECT. HOW WAS THE COVER MADE?

JACKSON: Martin and I write the story, then send it to Biz (Simon Bisley) who works his magic. Then it goes to Ryan Brown for it to be digitally painted. No inks--straight to paint. All the interior pages are totally 2D pencils and colors.

BRENNAN: The covers are the work of tech company Inlifesize, and animation genius Greg Maguire. Greg is a legend, having previously worked on *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azakaban, Happy Feet, Avatar, Terminator,* etc. – the list goes on. Unfortunately though we can't tell how the tech is done – that's all part of the mystery… let fans enjoy the covers and wonder how it's done. We want to hear them scream, "Damn!! Why didn't we think of that?!"

WHAT ARE THE LONG TERM PLANS FOR *13 COINS*? WILL THE BATTLE BETWEEN THE SON AND THE FALLEN CONTINUE FOR A WHILE?

JACKSON: *13 Coins* will keep going in a path that we think will make it unique in the comic industry, and for as long as people read it and enjoy it. And as we said, there are side stories that will run alongside the main story of John. Just be prepared to pick a side. Are you of The SON? Or do you choose The Fallen?

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6" TALL!

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BATMAN™ CLASSIC TV SERIES RESIN BATMAN BUST

It's a brand-new line from Diamond Select Toys! The company that brought you busts for so many classic properties is turning their attention to what may be the most classic of them all: the Classic *BATMAN* TV series! *BATMAN* himself kicks off what is sure to be an epic line, designed by Barry Bradfield and sculpted by Jean St. Jean!

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VINTAGE PAPER CHASE

by Mark Seifert & William Christensen

It's time to focus on the evil part of the good vs evil comic book equation. Great comic heroes need equally great villains. That's something that comic book creators discovered very early on in the Golden Age.

And villains sometimes turn up in the most surprising places. Everybody knows the first appearance of Superman is in *Action Comics #1*. Many people know that the first appearance of Spider-Man is in *Amazing Fantasy #15*. But when a villain turns up out of nowhere in the middle of a series—that's when things get interesting, for both readers and collectors.

Golden Age

A few of the most important villains of the Golden Age have first appearances in keys that are also valuable for other important reasons. If you want the first appearance of the Joker, or the first appearance of Catwoman, you've got to spend the money on a *Batman #1* (but wow... what a book). If you want the first appearance of the Red Skull, you've got to buy a *Captain America #1*. Both of those are five to six-figure books, but if you want the first appearance of Lex Luthor—the most important Superman villain and certainly one of the most important villains in all of comics—you might be able to find a copy of *Action Comics #23* that is still relatively affordable. A CGC 3.0 copy went for $3126 in early March, and a CGC 4.5 went for $5623 last year. On the rise, but still not what it will be considering its importance.

Silver Age

If you've been reading Vintage Paper Chase over the past year, you know that even the hint of a rumor about a character in a Marvel movie can move the vintage comics market overnight. *Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos #5*, the first appearance of villain Baron Strucker, is the latest example of this phenomenon. The character is appearing in the upcoming 2015 film *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, and reportedly will play a part in two other upcoming Marvel movies.

Few Marvel keys from the mid-1960s are outrageously tough to get—if you're willing to spend the money. *Sgt. Fury #5* appears to be far tougher than most Marvel keys of this era, particularly in high grade. There's fewer than 30 copies at CGC 9.0 or above on the census, and only a small handful of those have traded hands in the past few years. The CGC 9.6 copy from the Don and Maggie Thompson collection went for $2271 last month, and if you can find a high grade raw copy in the $400-550

SGT. FURY
AND HIS
HOWLING
COMMANDOS
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
IND.
5
JAN.
MARVEL
12¢
WATCH THE DREADED NAZI BARON STRUCKER, DEFEAT NICK FURY IN HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT!
BUT DON'T DARE MISS THE ELECTRIFYING ENDING OF...
"AT THE MERCY OF BARON STRUCKER"
ALONE, UNARMED, AT THE MERCY OF THE S.S. TROOPS, FURY SEEMS TO BE DOOMED!

range, that's probably a good get.

Batman #121, the first appearance of Mr. Freeze, is even tougher to get in high grade. Long overshadowed by DC's other household name Batman villains such as Joker, Penguin, and Catwoman, the first appearance of Mr Freeze has come into its own among Silver Age collectors recently for being a true Silver Age first appearance (many classic Batman villains originated in the Golden Age), and for having a white cover that makes a pretty copy that much harder to obtain. A solid CGC 6.0 copy went for $1100 recently.

Bronze Age

We've talked quite a bit about Bronze Age heavy-hitter villains Thanos and Darkseid over the past year, but while speculator's eyes are on the comic book films of the future, you might be able to quietly get in on the first appearance of an important villain of films of the recent past and present, who went legend in the hearts and minds of many with Rebecca Romijn's portrayal in the first three X-Men films, and who is sure to be important in both comics and film in the foreseeable future. The first appearance of Mystique in *Ms Marvel #18* hit $960 in CGC 9.8 recently. This book has had its ups and downs over the past decade and appears to be on the rise again. High grade raw copies are running from $200-300 currently, so if you're patient it's still possible to get a bargain.

But if your heart is still set on a Thanos key and you can't afford an *Iron Man #55*, the obscurely interesting *Logan's Run #6* might be a worthwhile alternative. The book contains the first Thanos solo story as a backup feature, and a CGC 9.8 copy went for $330 recently. High grade raw copies can be had for under $50, and it is definitely worth looking out for at that price.

The Future Of Vintage Paper

Do you know of any vintage comic sales of note? Are you an experienced dealer or collector who wants to contribute info? Let us know at: *vintage-paper@bleedingcool.com*.

HOT COMICS: SUPPLY, DEMAND, AND COMIC BOOKS

By Rich Johnston

This year has seen the changing aftermarket responding more to film and TV announcements than ever before. And it can highlight the new and resurrect the old, equally.

Gullermo Del Toro's *The Strain* has been performing gangbusters for Dark Horse where an raw issue can sell for over $50 without trying, or around $100 when slabbed. All issues are affected; issues 1-11 just sold on eBay for $190 without difficulty. But it's another example of a TV or movie option suddenly raising the demand and desirability for a comic series. There's a lot of it about right now...

Case in point, *Preacher*. A hot book turned cold, the news of the AMC TV series has sent back issues of this comic into overdrive. And that's before they've filmed one scene. Issue 1 with a 9.8 CGC ranking just sold on eBay for $750 with a raw version selling for $385, a copy of the Absolute Vertigo preview of the book sold for $200 9.8 CGC in the same condition or $50 raw. And the very flimsy floppy *Preacher Preview*, given free to comic stores, has sold for, wait for it, $610 in 9.8 CGC back in November and $218 raw in January. Considering how well *Walking Dead* has sold on the aftermarket, there would be room for growth, though there were far more *Preacher #1* printed than *Walking Dead #1*.

Red Star was a series from Image Comics in 2000. Originally optioned by Warner Bros, it's now getting multi-media attention from Ashley Edward Miller and Zack Stentz, who are credited with writing for *Thor* and *X-Men: First Class* but are looking at a TV version. Now these were being picked up easily for cover price but recent attention has seen issue 1 get ten dollars online, but again it's worth bin diving at your local shop to see what you can find.

The announcement of a CW pilot for *iZombie* has sent this comic book roaring up the back market. A first appearance in *House Of Mystery Halloween Annual* from DC/Vertigo has sold for up to $40, which issue 1 gets $33 for the Darwyn Cooke variant and the standard cover for $35.

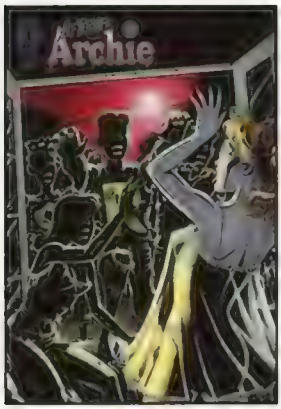
Sheltered #1, also gets up to $73 in CGC 9.8, though out of the slab it's $12. Other variants from Image Expo are popular, and there are lots of signed and sketched versions in and out of the slabs as well.

Sex Criminals #1 is selling for $50 when CGC 9.8'ed with #2 at $37, but the subsequent prints are getting plenty of attention as well, especially the 4th print

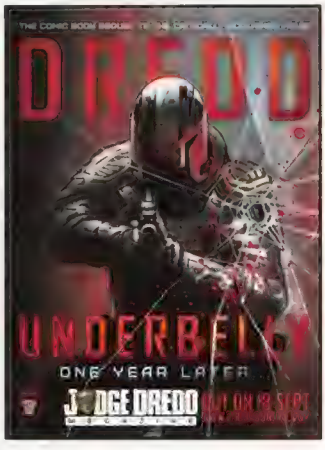
with the photo cover of the creators hitting for $30 out of the slab.

And here's some nice advance speculation for you. *Haunted* is a new comic out from Red 5 in April, with a Free Comic Book Day version for May. And it's been optioned ahead of publication by Bryan Singer's production company Bad Hat Harry for a movie, or something. Might be worth picking up a copy, especially the free ones!

With Pepoy's variant cover for *Afterlife With Archie #1* with Betty in a see through nightdress going for up to $35, all eyes will be on issue 5, with Pepoy returning to draw Veronica in lingerie, running from the Riverdale zombies.



Manifest Destiny was one of my favourite launches of the year. The Long Beach Comic Con sketch variant can reach over $350 in CGC 9.8, but even without the slab, fetches $200 raw. The standard release sells for up to $65 slabbed and $20 raw. While a number of Image Comics books were high ordered and performed as expected, this is one of those books that had lower expectations, and surpassed them! Just like the good old days!



Judge Dredd: Underbelly was a sequel to the Dredd film, initially serialised in *Judge Dredd Megazine*, then released as a collection in the US and now selling for up to $35 in decent nick.

DMZ #1 can get $75 as 9.8 CGC, a 2008 Comic Con exclusive version sells for $12, while issue 1 sells raw for around $6 to $7. It also helps that *DMZ* is a really good comic book, with Manhattan turned into a no man's land of lawlessness, power play, and terror. It might be worth picking up (also check your retailer dollar bins) and sitting on it for a little.

Commercial Suicide is a three volume perfect bound anthology from 2004 edited by Kieron Gillen and Alex De Campi, the brief was to create the wrongest and most offensive comics possible, featuring creators including Gillen and De Campi, but also Jamie McKelvie, Al Ewing, Jamie Boardman, Tim Twelves, Juan Arteaga, Felipe Sobreiro, Dave Marquez, Simon Fraser, and more. It was self-distributed in the US and UK. If you can find them, they are probably very cheap. But blackmailing copies against creators who have now gone on to do more respectable things, that's where the real money is.

Oh and *Green Arrow #24*. First New 52 appearance of Diggle. Lots of demand, copies running out. Watch for this one...

PRICE GUIDE
for Collectors and Sellers

Welcome to the Bleeding Cool Price Guide. This is a snippet of the kind of prices comics are selling for on the open market. Rich Johnston scoured the web and thousands of online auction listings to provide this snapshot of comic book sales. A price listed here is no guarantee you'll be able to sell yours for that price, but it might give you an idea of what someone, somewhere, is willing to pay! Retailers who would like to become part of an advisory board for the Price Guide feature should contact Jim Kuhoric via email: *jimkuhoric@bleedingcool.com*

MY LITTLE PONY - IDW

FRIENDS FOREVER

#1 Hastings Variant	$15
#1 Cover F CGC 9.8	$51
#1 Jetpack Comics Variant	$25
#1 Subscription Variant	$20

FRIENDSHIP IS MAGIC

#1 Hot Topic Doctor Whooves	$60
#1 Midtown Variant	$40
#1 Larry's Comics	$25
#1 Jetpack Comics Variant	$25
#1 1:10 Variant	$20
#2 Larry's Comics CGC 9.8	$50
#2 Midtown Variant	$24
#3 Gangam Style Variant	$37
#4 Dynamic Forces Edition	$35
#5 Dynamic Forces Edition	$30
#5 Midtown Variant	$17
#7 Retailer Incentive CGC 9.8	$43
#8 Cover A	$17
#8 Emerald Knights Variant	$16
#9 SDCC 2013 Variant	$40
#9 Jetpack Comics Variant	$20
#9 Stockton Con	$16
#10 Fan Expo Variant	$20
#10 Jetpack Comics Variant	$20
#11 Awesome Con Variant	$45
#12 Artist Rough Cover	$60
#13 Jetpack Comics Variant	$24
#13 Hastings Variant	$20
#14 Artist Rough Cover	$67

#14 Jetpack Comics Variant	$20
#15 Jetpack Comics Variant	$20

MICRO SERIES

#1 Twilight Sprinkle Dynamic Forces	$20
#5 Pinkie Pie Re-Source Exclusive	$35
#5 Pinkie Pie Bot Con Exclusive	$99
#6 Apple Jack Artist Rough Cover	$59
#9 Spike Retailer Incentive CGC 9.8	$54
#9 Spike Jetpack Comics Variant	$25
#10 Luna Jetpack Comics Variant	$20

ADVENTURE TIME - Boom!

SDCC Exclusive Vol 1 HC	$140
ECCC Exclusive Vol 1 HC	$36
SDCC Exclusive Vol 2 HC	$42
ECCC Exclusive Vol 2 HC	$35
#1 CGC 9.8	$100
#1 Annapolis CC CGC 9.8	$100
#1 Chapel Hill Comics	$45
#1 Candy Caper Variant	$40
#1 Cover A	$50
#1 Cover B	$50
#10 Dynamic Forces Variant	$27
#11 Marvel Variant CGC 9.8	$140
#11 Houghton Cover	$50
#13 Cover C	$27
#14 Princess Bubblegum Var	$22
#15 Marceline Vampire Queen	$40
#16 Phoenix Comic Con	$25
#21 Detroit Fanfare Variant	$40
#22 Brett's Collector Edition	$50

w/ Finn & Jake

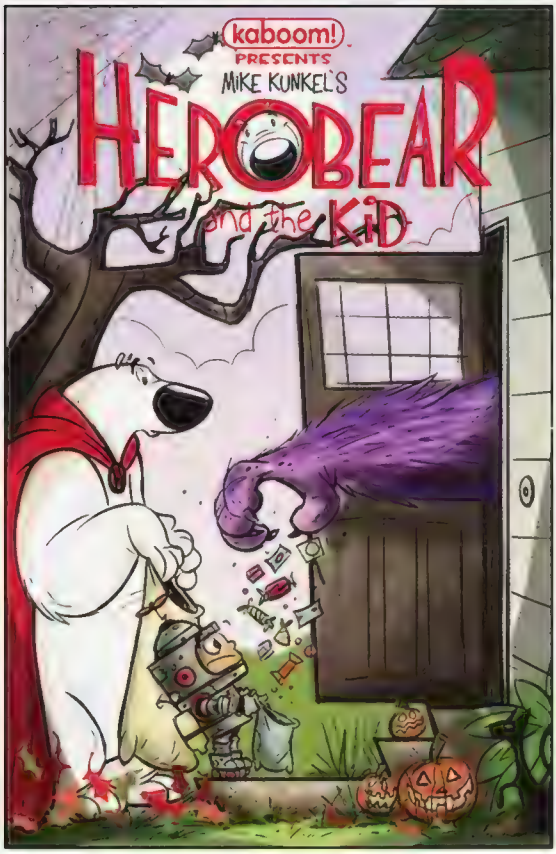
#1 Cover A	$45
#1 Cover B	$70
#1 Cover C	$25
#1 Cover E	$27
#2 Cover A	$29
#3 Cover D	$22

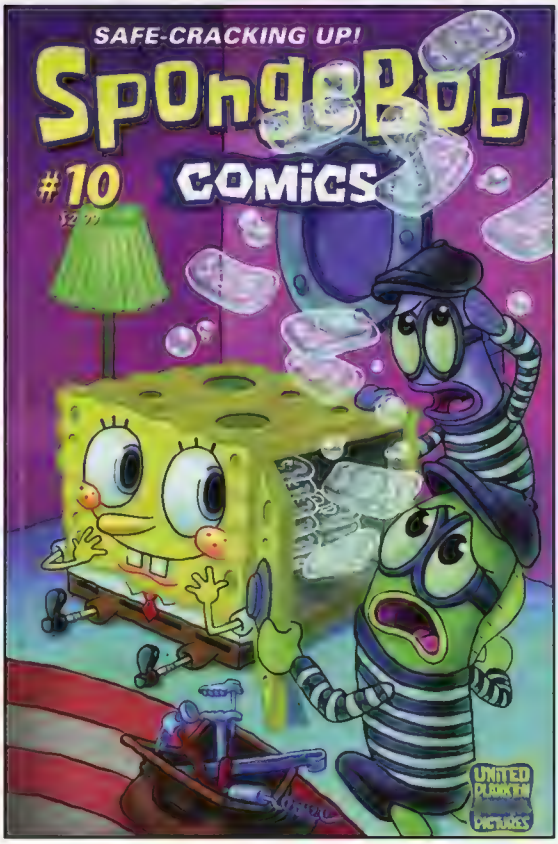
w/ Fionna & Cake

#1 Awesome Con Variant	$50
#1 Dynamic Forces Variant	$30

SPONGE BOB - Bongo

#1 CGC 9.8	$18
#1	$15
#2	$10
#3	$3

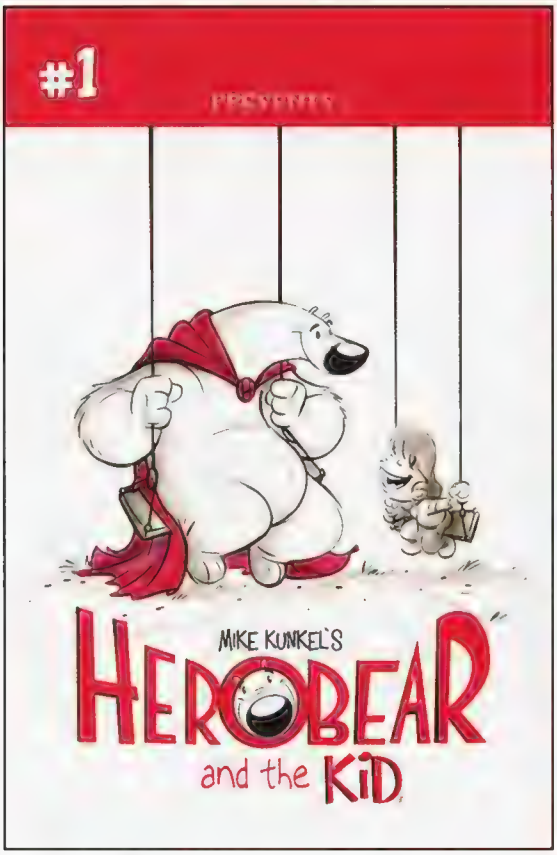




#4	$10
#5	$10
#6	$10
#7	$9
#8	$5
#9	$4
#10	$5
#11	$8
#13	$4
#14	$4
#15	$6
#16	$4
#17	$4
Annual #1	$6
Free-For-All FCBD	$4
Freestyle Funnies	$4

HEROBEAR AND THE KID

#1	$28
#2	$6
#4	$4
Special #1 SDCC 2013	$30
Annual #1	$4
Annual #1 Recalled Edition	$10



THE INHERITANCE

#1	$34
#2	$4
#4	$5

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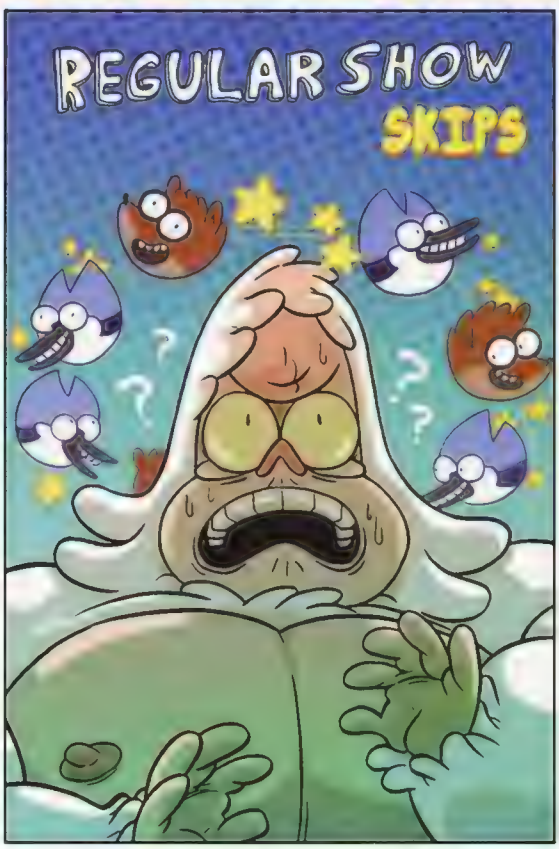

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